LORD GARLFORD'S FREAK.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

THE ROCHFORD ROBBERY.

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BY

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AUTHOR OF 'THE RECTOR OF OXBURY.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

LORD GARLFORD'S FREAK.

CHAPTER I.

THREE TO ONE.

SEBASTIAN stood still a moment to consider which direction he should take. His foes were lurking in ambush somewhere, but he might possibly be able to give them the slip. He was now in the very heart of the town—a long distance from his lodgings in the watchmakers' quarter, which lay in the western suburb. By avoiding all the direct routes, and making a wide circuit, he might escape them. He was more likely to be attacked at some point near his own home, for there the thoroughfares were dark and lonely.

Turning to the left, he cautiously but swiftly moved down the winding alley, having the backs of the houses on one side, and the churchyard, full of ghostly gravestones staring spectre-like in the gloom, on the other. Safely reaching the end of the alley, he turned again to the left and was now in the well-lighted streets. At this late hour, however, they were deserted, for the taverns and other places of amusement had been closed long since. He passed several obscure entries and gloomy courts, keeping always on the alert lest his enemies should suddenly issue from one of these and dart upon him at unawares. One solitary wayfarer he met—a reveller, homeward bound, but one whose heart seemed free and joyous, for it had no weight of dread upon it, no fear of violence. Sebastian hurried on, whistling softly to himself, to keep up his courage. Street after street he traversed, but as yet his foes had not encountered him. There, in the distance, was a policeman on his beat; and here, at this corner, was another. The young craftsman said 'Good night,' and strode on, saying not a word of that which he apprehended, nor

dreaming that he would seek for protection. It might be only an idle, groundless alarm after all! If not, why, he would either fight, or run for his life, as the case might be. It was three against one, the majority armed, perhaps, the minority weaponless and with the left arm disabled! He would put his trust in God and go forward. The tears came into his eyes as he thought of Felicia. He felt thankful he had told her of his love. After he was dead and buried she would think kindly of him.

More gloomy courts were passed, more obscure entries; but these possible hiding-places were left behind, and still Sebastian's enemies were unseen and had made no sign. But now he was nearing the outskirts of the city. Dwellings were becoming few and far between. The open country was in sight and the dark foliage of trees against the midnight sky. At this moment a light in an upper window was extinguished. Our hero had been looking at that light shining through the drawn blind, and had felt some envy in his bosom towards those who were retiring to rest, secure in their own homes.

How fervently he wished he were as safe in his own lodgings! But see, those lodgings were now in sight! Brain and pulse throbbed with excitement as he walked quickly along. He seemed to fly, so rapidly did he cover the ground in his anxiety.

He had passed the stone bridge and the ruins of the lepers' hospital and was hastening along in the shadow of a wall—looking intently forward now, and no longer stealing furtive glances around and behind—when he was seized suddenly, and the next instant his mouth was gagged. He fought like a lion, but a heavy blow upon his right temple made him reel and lose all sensation. His assailants began to drag him in the direction of an old hovel in a field close by, near to which was a stagnant pool; but they were unexpectedly baulked of their murderous intention, for now the sound of wheels was heard and lamps were seen as a vehicle was urged madly forward on the road leading from Bayborough. In twenty seconds the vehicle—a gig containing two men—reached the spot where the struggle had taken place, but not before the ruffians had leaped the

hedge and disappeared, leaving their victim prostrate on the ground.

By great good fortune, one of the occupants of the gig observed the body—the wheels passing close by it—and he jumped down as his companion pulled up the strong bay horse with a jerk.

It was Alderman Jeffard and Mr. Laxey whose opportune arrival upon the scene had saved the life of the young inventor. The reader already knows that they started together at half-past nine that morning to fetch certain costumes and fancy dresses for the pageant. They had been indefatigable in their exertions at Bayborough, and had not only secured the properties required, but had also hired three additional brass bands. Their labours of love had detained them to a much later hour than they expected, which was the reason of their furious driving at midnight.

The light of the lamps shone upon the unconscious face of Sebastian as the alderman and his friends alighted from their gig, and went towards him. They recognised him without much difficulty, for the craftsman was well-known in the city.

'It's young Botoner, by George!' cried the alderman.

'Then his lodgings are close at hand—they are!" said the councillor vehemently. 'I will run and ring the people up—I will;' and off he went like a shot.

'What a noosance it is that, except ourselves, everybody's in bed,' said Jeffard to himself as he was doing his best to restore our hero to consciousness. 'It'll be half-an-hour at least before hannybody comes.' The good Samaritan had taken the gag from Sebastian's mouth, and poured a little brandy down his throat, when Laxey returned, having roused Hoone, the landlord, from his slumbers. They conveyed Botoner to his lodgings, and carefully laid him upon his bed.

Mrs. Hoone was quickly in attendance, and busied herself in applying restoratives. She found Laxey an excellent assistant—so adroit, sympathetic, and cheerful was he. He did the right thing at the proper moment and the best manner possible. It was some time before the inventor showed signs of returning animation, but at length their exertions were rewarded and their

anxiety relieved. Still, the patient was unable to speak; so it was judged best by the alderman and his friends, although they burned with impatience to learn from his lips the names of his assailants, and the motive of their attack, to leave him to the care of Mrs. Hoone. They remounted their gig, therefore, and drove off, having promised to call again in the course of the next day.

Jeffard and the councillor had both been invited to be present when Sebastian's model was put to the proof, but they had considered the trip to Bayborough a more important matter, and had sent an apology by Mr. Eagles. They shrewdly surmised that the midnight attack had some connection with that experiment. Feeling unable, however, for want of sufficient data, to penetrate the mystery, they resolved to get the whole truth from the young craftsman.

Accordingly, the next afternoon, when they came to his lodgings, and found him considerably better, and able to converse with them, they requested him to hide nothing from them.

'Tell us everything, and I will see you righted—be hanged if I won't!' said Jeffard, encouragingly.

Botoner then told them that the experiment had been a failure in consequence of the treachery of Hemmings, who had been a secret enemy from the very beginning. Wabsale was, he believed, an honest man, but Saul and Pitcherley and the blacksmith were all villains; and he then described what had taken place at the meeting held in Wabsale's house.

The alderman and his friend now felt that the mystery was solved.

'You recognised the ruffians, of course, when they attacked you?'

'Yes; the three men were Hemmings, Saul Wabsale, and Pitcherley.'

'Which of them struck that blow on your temple?'

'The blacksmith.'

'Then it seems,' said Laxey, 'that our procession on Monday will be shorn of three of its chief ornaments, who will be safely lodged in the police cell instead.'

The alderman sighed.

'Yes, old man; my labour *there* has all been in vain—what a noosance!'

Sebastian looked perplexed.

'Ah! you don't see the joke,' said Jeffard to him; 'but the three miscreants you have named were to have ridden in the pageant. I had hired 'em for the day, you know, and promised 'em their vittals and five shillings each. They'll be fed at the country's expense instead, ha, ha, ha!'

'Perhaps we shall be able to find substitutes?' suggested the councillor.

'Hardly,—there isn't time enough—be hanged if there is!'

'Then let us hope they will not be missed among such a great number of riders,' said Laxey.

'As to numbers,' said the alderman, 'there are not half so many now-a-days as there were when I was a young man.'

'Indeed!'

'No; the procession has dwindled down to a mere shadow of its former self. Why, you should have seen it in the time of the old corporation. I remember when the mayor and councillors all rode in state, wear-

ing their robes, chains, and badges, and proud to lend their dignity to the ceremonial. They haven't done that for thirty years, and yet they complain that the show is becoming vulgar.'

'If we have many more mayors like the present one,' said Laxey, 'there will soon be no procession at all.'

'There *shall* be a procession as long as I live, hanny way,' protested Jeffard. 'Life let us cherish, and be jolly while you can—that's my motter.'

'And mine,' said the councillor.

'I told Eagles the same, when he opposed our having the procession this year. Eagles knows I don't like his sanctimonious ways. But I beg your pardon, Mr. Botoner,' he added, turning to the inventor, 'I forgot that you attend Thacker's Yard, and probably hold similar sentiments to those of our worthy chief magistrate—be hanged if I didn't.'

Sebastian never shrank from avowing his opinions when called upon to do so. His pale face flushed as he replied,—

'If Mr. Eagles is sanctimonious, I am so

too. I *do* hold similar views upon the subject you are now discussing, Mr. Jeffard.'

'Then I beg your pardon again, and I withdraw that expression, Mr. Botoner,' said the alderman; 'for I would not willingly wound the feelings of hanny man.'

After this handsome apology the conversation reverted to Sebastian's struggles and difficulties with regard to the model of the steam tramway car.

'You mustn't give it up, Mr. Botoner, on hanny account,' said Jeffard. 'Whatever money you need to carry on your work, and to bring your invention to a complete state, I will supply—be hanged if I won't!'

'And I hope you will allow me to assist you also, in the same manner,' added Laxey. 'I shall be happy to contribute twenty pounds at once to that object.'

Sebastian thanked them warmly, and said he hoped now to be able to perfect his model without further delay.

'Well, we will now take our leave,' said Jeffard. 'You nurse yourself carefully for a day or two, and you will then be all right.

As we go we will call at the police station, and lodge information respecting the attack made upon you by those three ruffians, and they shall be arrested forthwith, by George! Come along, old man.'

In the course of the day the invalid received a kind message of condolence from the mayor, who had heard of the midnight attack, and who promised to send him a reply to his letter in a few days. Certain jellies and light puddings also found their way to the inventor's lodgings, and a dainty little note from Felicia, which the young craftsman kissed over and over again, and placed next his heart. The fact is Mr. Eagles judged it more wise and prudent to abstain from harsh interference between his daughter and her lover. He had the utmost confidence in her, and believed that if left alone she would act with discretion. It was understood she was to take her own course; but that the young people were to be reserved and patient, and were neither to correspond with nor to speak to each other, except occasionally; and were to exercise extreme caution lest the attachment should come to the knowledge of the public.

Meanwhile, Alderman Jeffard and his friend had given information at the police station, and constables were despatched to arrest the three men. It was found, however, that since the night of the attack none of them had been seen in the city, nor could their whereabouts be discovered. It was remembered that they had on several occasions expressed an intention of leaving the country; but whether they had done so or not the authorities had not yet ascertained. Probably they were hiding in the neighbourhood; some thought they had fled to Bayborough. Mr. Jeffard and Councillor Laxey were convinced that the men would turn up on the morning of the procession, and might be arrested in St. John's Hall. They were desperate fellows, and great caution would be required. The utmost vigilance was shown by the police, but the public were not informed upon whom suspicion rested, or who the men were they were searching for. By observing secrecy it was thought the ruffians might possibly have the hardihood to keep their engage ment with Alderman Jeffard.

CHAPTER II.

'TAKE ME TO SEE THIS SHOW.'

THE reader has already learned that Lord Garlford — now driving his drag daily between Davenstone and Bayborough for the pleasure of the public, and making a reasonable charge for seats thereon,—the reader knows, we repeat, that this lord was a personage against whom many hard things had been said, many of which hard things he certainly did not deserve. The earl was not vicious or profligate; but he had committed many acts of indiscretion in his lifetime, and these had been magnified by those who hated and despised him, and also by others whose tongues must wag whether they killed reputations or not. It would seem that he was utterly detested by many of his equals,

who might yet have been at a loss to explain the reason, since he was never known to have done anyone a serious injury, and, moreover, always behaved himself like a gentleman and a peer of the realm. In reality, excessive obstinacy and self-conceit were the chief faults in his character. But unfortunately these and other failings were in the lord so strongly developed, and were so apparent to all who had dealings with him, that persons of his own rank frequently declared they could not tolerate his society. If he had been less egotistical they could have borne with him. But the earl had always been too fond of using the 'first person singular' in his conversation. This fault had been strikingly manifest at a very early age, and it had been found impossible to cure him of it. His noble father, the late earl, his lady mother the countess, his tutor, his playfellows, all had scolded and mocked at him; but in vain. He only became more confirmed in the habit as he grew older, so that the late earl had despairingly protested, — 'Charles will be an egotist to the end of his days.'

At Eton, Lord Wringer, which was his title at that period — soon made himself notorious by his practice of continually using the pronoun *I* in his familiar talk. He always would make himself the hero of every tale, the never-failing theme of his own discourse. His achievements in boating, cricketing, riding, boxing, etc., were all narrated over and over again *ad nauseum*, while he seemed totally indifferent to the doings of his companions.

When he went up to the university, this self-importance had become considerably strengthened. He was always victimising his acquaintances in Christ Church, Oxford, by relating long-winded stories about himself, analysing and dissecting his own character, asking advice about the veriest trifles that concerned his own interests, fishing for compliments, and by various devices preventing the introduction of any topic save and except Lord Wringer. He asked for advice, truly; but he was never known to follow it, being the most wilful of men. Yet he would innocently wonder if his friends betrayed any impatience with him;

or else those close-set dark eyes of his would gleam with a lurid light, he would stiffen his back, and would hug his views or his purposes all the closer and carry them out all the more perseveringly for contradiction and ridicule. When he left the university, his *alma mater* parted from one who for wilfulness, self-esteem, and inconstancy had no equal; one, too, who on certain matters hardly seemed to possess sanity, in the opinion of his intimates.

His failings blossomed forth luxuriantly when he entered into public life. His career in the House of Lords was a short one, and marked by his accustomed eccentricity, changeableness, and vanity. Moreover, his repeated attempts to enter the holy estate of matrimony were singularly unfortunate, notwithstanding that the old earl was dead, and he had come into his title and all his estates. His want of success was attributed by those who were supposed good judges to the following causes:—*first*, his estates were all heavily encumbered—the lord was wretchedly poor; *secondly*, he was not well-esteemed, for the reasons we have

mentioned; *thirdly*, his early addresses were paid to proud beauties who were already engaged, and who saw no sufficient reasons for being off with the old love to be on with the new; *lastly*, he aspired to ally himself with the highest in rank, yet never bestowed sufficient care or trouble to secure the acceptance of his suit. The present writer cannot verify all that common report affirmed, but merely records these particulars, inasmuch as this history would be incomplete without them.

Wringer in those days had one intimate friend—the Honourable Tom Chutney. One day the lord walked into his rooms and said,—

'Tom, old fellow, you really must tell me what to do.'

This was his formula—the familiar prelude to a wearisome rigmarole having the Earl of Garlford for its centre and circumference.

'What now, Charlie?'

The Honourable Tom knew that he would have to submit to the infliction, so he submitted with a good grace. *Chutney* was a very unsuitable and inappropriate cognomen in his case, for he was the best tempered and

most amiable of men. He could tolerate even the earl!

'You remember our meeting with Lady —— at —— House the other evening?' the lord asked, settling himself in an easy chair that he might deliver the rigmarole comfortably.

'Perfectly well, Charlie.'

'Do you know, Tom, I am desperately in love with her!' said the earl, sinking his tuneful voice to a stage whisper.

Chutney had a conviction in his own mind that the only person in the wide world with whom his friend was desperately in love was the Right Honourable the Earl of Garlford, but he did not say so. His response was simply this,—

'Are you, indeed, Charlie?'

'I am, Tom.'

'Did you say as much to her ladyship? I noticed you were talking to her nearly the whole of the evening.'

'*Rather not!* Nothing passed between us but the merest civilities.'

'Oh!'

'You see, we had only met once before; but I am awfully fond of her, Tom; and what do you think I am going to do?'

'Propose to her?'

'Yes; I shall ask her ladyship if she will have me.'

'When, Charlie?'

'At once. Now, which would you advise me to do—shall I propose to her by letter or shall I tell her, you know?'

'Neither, Charlie, if you are a wise man. Haven't you heard? Lord —— popped to her yesterday, and she accepted him. I was going to tell you before, but you put it out of my head.'

'It will make no difference. I made up my mind to ask her, and I will. I have heard, Tom, that her ladyship did NOT accept him. I shall write to her!'

'Don't write, Charlie!'

The lord had never yet been turned aside from any path he had chosen. Counsel, opposition, and argument only made him more obdurate. He stiffened his back, and a strange light shone from his eyes. The Honourable Tom sometimes thought him scarcely sane.

'I mean to write to her, Tom!'

'Very well, Charlie; but if I were you I

should think the matter over again for a day or two before writing.'

'No; I shall write at once.'

'Then make up your mind for a disappointment.'

The earl stayed a couple of hours, beginning again, and going through the rigmaroles everal times, until Chutney was fairly exhausted. But when he went away at last, Chutney did not believe he would actually carry out his purpose.

The lord called again, however, the same afternoon, and showed him a copy of the letter he had despatched to Lady ——. As he perused it, he could scarcely keep from laughing at the puerility of the missive.

'Have you actually sent it?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'Then summon up all your fortitude, Charlie. I don't think her ladyship will have you. The other man is so awfully rich.'

The next morning the Honourable Tom had just breakfasted and was smoking an enormous cigar when his tormentor came in again.

'Here is her ladyship's answer,' said the

lord, tossing towards him a little scented note. Chutney picked it up and read a few frigid correct lines declining the honour of the alliance.

'I told you so, Charlie.'

The earl's reply was a peal of loud laughter which seemed to shake the room.

Chutney looked at him suspiciously from beneath his heavy eyebrows.

'The man is cracked, by Jove!' he said to himself.

So that was the end of the first attempt. The lord, it was said, made several others in the course of the season, but with no better success, and then in disgust he came down to Garlford Castle, leaving behind him a reputation as the most vain and opinionated nobleman in Her Majesty's dominions.

Garlford Castle had been a feudal stronghold. It was an historic pile situated in a majestic and well-wooded park. Here, then, the earl took up his residence, his mother, the countess, also staying with him for the present.

The countess was cold and dignified in her demeanour. When her son told her he

meant to drive a four-in-hand coach between Davenstone and Bayborough daily, she said with some displeasure,—

'I do not like these vagaries, Charles.'

Her son's changeful, whimsical character, his excessive self-esteem and egotism, had been a trouble to her. But though she had long known that his faults were most intensified when any effort was made to check or thwart him, yet she sometimes unwisely opposed her will to his, thereby driving him into the very course she most wished him to avoid.

'I have told you my reasons, mother,' said the lord.

'Yes, but the proceeding is very irregular, Charles. I wish you would give it up. It is not too late.'

'But I have already completed my arrangements, mother, and placards announcing the journeys are published both in Bayborough and Davenstone. I cannot draw back.'

'Then I am exceedingly grieved, Charles.'

For several days after the coach had begun to ply between the two towns, the countess would not listen to him when he began to

relate to her the adventures he had met with, invariably rising and leaving the apartment. By degrees, however, she became reconciled to his undertaking, or, to speak more correctly, knowing she would have to submit, she submitted. His manner to her was sometimes exceedingly cool and exasperating, but she tried not to resent it, and now endeavoured to listen with patience. During dinner he had much to tell her respecting the events of the day, himself being of course the central figure in the narrative. Once he told her he had been playing billiards at the club in Davenstone with a tallow chandler.

'What!' cried the horror-stricken countess, starting away from him.

'A tallow chandler, mother.'

'How dreadful, Charles!' said the countess, endeavouring to recover her composure. 'Why will you so demean yourself?'

'I had to play with them to kill the time, mother. Besides the tallow chandler there were two other men, a pawnbroker and a clothier—an alderman named Jeffard.'

'Charles, I do believe you would rather be among coalheavers and hodmen, than

keep your position in life. It is unseemly in the highest degree!'

'It was so dull; I was obliged to do something.'

Every evening during dinner the earl recounted some adventure or other of which he was the hero. Once the countess was in an ill-humour and remonstrated with languid dignity.

'Had we not better talk of something else, Charles? It becomes somewhat monotonous when you are *always* the subject of conversation.'

A week or two after this the lord was enabled to introduce a little variety into his monologues. He told the countess about the great fair so soon to be held in Davenstone, and the wonderful spectacle that was being prepared for the Monday of that week —a spectacle that always attracted an immense number of persons of all grades of society, and from every part of the country. Even the countess felt some interest in her son's description of the pageant about to take place, and one evening she condescended to say,—

'Take me to see this show.'

'With pleasure, mother. I know a window from which you can see everything; it commands three of the principal streets in the centre of the town. It is the best window for the purpose in Davenstone.'

'Where is that, Charles?'

'At the Lady Enid Hotel,' replied the earl.

'That is the inn your coach starts from, is it not?'

'Yes.'

For several minutes the countess seemed to be pondering the subject. Her countenance wore a smile as she asked,

'What is the landlord's name?'

'Melody. He is an excellent man, and the hotel is the best conducted that I have ever met with. Of course we shall have a room to ourselves.'

'It will be very nice, Charles,' said the countess; and thus it was arranged. Lord Garlford at once wrote to the innkeeper, and secured the best room in the 'Lady Enid' for the purpose he had mentioned.

CHAPTER III.

AN INTERRRUPTION.

ALDERMAN JEFFARD felt quite persuaded in his own mind that the three men who had attacked the young inventor, and who had since been concealing themselves, would have the hardihood to keep their engagement by appearing on Monday morning for the purpose of taking their several parts in the procession. He accordingly gave directions to the police to maintain a strict watch around the entrances to St. John's Hall—the place of rendezvous and point of departure; and further, since the streets would be thronged from an early hour the men were to be allowed quietly to enter the building, where they could be arrested with less disturbance. It was also decided that Mr.

Jeffard should give a signal for the constables to enter and take them into custody.

When the eventful morning dawned, the alderman rose with the lark and forthwith recommenced his labours. As chairman of the committee he had to see that the pageant passed off successfully. He moved rapidly hither and thither through the town (which was astir at daybreak with delighted expectation), issuing his final instructions to the various performers, and also distributing the various 'properties,' —such at least as had not already been set apart. His wardrobes were nearly emptied before to-day, but a few fancy dresses remained to be given out. What a collection! Ribbons, lace, jewels, ruffs, kirtles, and fardingales, costumes in silk, velvet, satin, and damask; elegant and costly robes of every reign and almost every clime; every variety of habits, military, civil, and ecclesiastical, lay scattered in heaps around him, but were speedily transferred to the respective wearers. A few only of the performers were to robe in St. John's Hall, the rest at their own homes. These last were requested to assemble outside the hall at half-past eleven o'clock. The procession was to

pass through all the streets of the town, with only one or two exceptions.

His arrangements completed, Mr. Jeffard at eleven o'clock walked through the crowded thoroughfares on his way to St. John's Hall. Arriving there, and the public entrance being for the present kept closed, he entered by a private door. Proceeding along a corridor he reached a quaint-looking lobby which opened upon the courtyard of the Hall. He was now in the midst of a very animated group. It was here that the more privileged persons and the chief characters were permitted to robe for pageant, the majority being obliged to do so in their own houses, and then to assemble outside the hall, where they were to wait until the Lady Enid, the central figure in the show, who was being attired in one of the upper rooms of the building, should make her appearance, and the signal should be given for the cavalcade to be set in motion.

One side of the courtyard was formed by the great hall. It had noble windows, and its crumbling walls spoke of its great antiquity. Underneath the hall was a magnificent vault or crypt. On the alderman's

right hand, as he entered the courtyard from the lobby, was the public entrance. It had a fine archway, with massive oak doors, admitting to a porch with a vaulted roof, and sculptured with grotesque nondescript animals rendered more grotesque by old age. At the opposite end of the courtyard was the ancient kitchen. This curiously constructed place, with its lofty pointed arches, immense fireplaces and turnspits, contained several ponderous oak tables of antiquated appearance. Beyond, were the bakery and store-rooms. A broad flight of stairs ascending from the kitchen to the great hall served for the conveyance of the good things provided by the cooks to the guests at the banquet, when the merchant princes of Davenstone entertained their royal and illustrious visitors in the olden time. Centuries ago these now rusty turnspits were clothed with mighty beef, these giant coppers filled with steaming joints, while the capacious cellars were charged with foaming nut-brown ale, and the bins stored with aged wine. Alderman Jeffard sighed as he thought of the decadence of these modern days, moving

where the very atmosphere had once been replete with fatness.

'We're not half so jovial now-a-days as we ought to be—be hanged if we are!' he said to Wabsale the butcher, who came up to begin robing for the procession.

'Right you are, sir,' returned he. 'The *Wabsales* in them times was well supported. People knew what good livin' was then, that they did, sir.'

The worthy knight of the cleaver was in trouble about Saul, though on this gala day he would not show it. He did not know the whereabouts of his son, or of his son's associates; yet he was not aware that the officers of justice were on the watch. The affair had been kept very quiet, purposely, to facilitate their capture. The alderman made no inquiries of Wabsale respecting them; but the latter dropped a word or two which led him to think they would probably make their appearance that morning.

The butcher was to personate Earl Geraint, the husband of the Lady Enid, and a sturdy Saxon noble. He was putting on a tunic of linen ornamented with tassels

which descended to his knees. It had long, close-rolled sleeves, and round it he now cast a jewelled girdle. He had drawn on red leathern hose and shoes painted black. He ornamented his dress with bracelets, crosses, and chains of ivory and of gold. Light brown hair flowed in thick ringlets to his girdle. Last of all he threw over him a short blue mantle, which he fastened with a golden brooch.

Several other persons were robing in the courtyard, but the three ruffians had not yet come. Alderman Jeffard was getting anxious. He would go and look if they were in the great hall. Leaving the busy groups, therefore, he ascended a broad staircase in the lobby, and passing along an ancient gallery entered the hall. A noble room, erected some four and a-half centuries back! Opulent, bold, and large-hearted were the traders who had reared this fine apartment wherein to dispense their profuse hospitality to royal guests. What amplitude and grandeur are here, even now! That large ancient north window, and those that pierce the side walls—all rich with old stained glass, and vivid

portraitures of august benefactors and civic dignitaries; that faded tapestry,—these emblems, mottoes, arms, and decorations; the antiquated chair of state, the minstrel gallery, the oriel, the paintings, and the carved roof,—all these objects render St. John's Hall at Davenstone such a fair and stately structure as is hardly to be surpassed by any similar building in the world!

And it seemed to-day as if the illustrious dead who had paced this polished floor in the olden time had come to life again and were as full of vitality as ever! The alderman went up to Richard the Third and spoke to him! 'How be *you*, sir,' said the royal hunchback, who was magnificently apparelled in a stomacher of blue cloth of gold wrought with nets and pine apples, a doublet slashed and laced across, hose of crimson satin, and a long gown of purple velvet furred with ermine. Jeffard also shook hands with Henry the Sixth and Queen Margaret, who grinned a hearty welcome. The latter wore a horned head-dress, with a veil attached to it figured and fringed with pear-shaped pearls; a brocaded amber-coloured gown,

cut square round the bust, and girded tightly at the waist, a turn-over collar of fur and an enormous train. Her royal husband was arrayed in crimson velvet, and wore a small flat cap with a large jewel. Men in armour were stalking about carrying pikes and swords; there were fair ladies, gay nobles, mediæval mayors, and sundry others personages of lofty mien, all waiting to take their places in the cavalcade. But neither Hemmings nor Saul Wabsale nor Pitcherley was among them; so the alderman turned back through the ante-room, down the broad oak staircase and into the courtyard again.

He changed colour, and fairly trembled with agitation and excitement, for the three men he sought were here! They must have entered the courtyard immediately after he left it, for already they were almost completely arrayed in their several habits, and were looking as unconcerned as though there was not a spot of guilt upon their consciences. The first figure upon whom Jeffard's eyes fell was that of Pitcherley. He stood close to the entrance. A white horse was beside him, bearing a new side-saddle richly caparisoned, with a saddle-

cloth embroidered with silver. This steed was intended to carry the person of the Lady Enid in the procession. A page in a sumptuous habit stood at the bridle-rein. Pitcherley was personating a begging friar. His bare feet pressed the cool broad flagstones of the court, a coarse black robe reaching to his ankles was girded with a thick rope, and his tonsured head was covered with an overshadowing cowl. He leaned upon the side-saddle and was chatting with the page.

Hemmings was within three yards of him. The blacksmith was dressed as a yeoman of the time of Richard the Second. He was clad in a coat and hood of green, having his horn slung in a baldrick, a silver figure of St. Christopher on his breast, and a gay, handsome braser on his arm. A sword and buckler hung on one side of him, a dagger on the other. A sheaf of arrows bright with peacocks' feathers was tucked beneath his girdle, and he carried a mighty bow in his hand. A goodly figure, covering a treacherous heart and an unquiet conscience! A number of men habited in Lincoln green were lounging about, each with a bugle horn, a quiver full of arrows, a baldrick,

a dagger, and a bow; and some of them holding dogs in leash.

The alderman's uneasy glance fell next upon Wabsale, the last of the three ruffians. He was surrounded by beautiful children (his little sister Sukey among them) dressed in costly habits and mounted on horses. These were a few of the 'followers.' The greater number were at this moment hurrying through the streets to the rendezvous, or else waiting outside the closed gateway. Saul Wabsale was to represent the Black Prince in the cavalcade. He was cased in complete steel. A vizored bascinet covered his head; he wore a magnificent jupon emblazoned with the prince's arms, and was girded with a military belt, to which was slung a huge sword. The whole of his plate armour was sable. An attendant was engaged in fixing the greaves upon his legs. His gauntlets armed with knobs or spikes of iron, lay upon the stone ledge of one of the apertures of the crypt.

Alderman Jeffard was anxious above all things that the men should be apprehended quietly. He first induced Wabsale senior, who had no suspicion of what was intended

to leave the courtyard and betake himself to the great hall. There he was instructed to wait until the procession started. Little Sukey also was gently lifted from the saddle and inveigled into the kitchen regions, where she was detained in honourable captivity to prevent any possible outcries or screams when her burly brother was marched off. Saul's gauntlets Mr. Jeffard surreptitiously removed from the ledge for fear of mischief. He did not expect he would offer any resistance to the constables; but those ugly weapons were best out of his reach. As to escape being attempted by any of the men, that was not likely either. They could not possibly get away, hemmed in as they were by high walls on all sides, the massive oak door admitting to the street being closed and securely fastened, while the corridor (the only remaining means of egress) was watched and guarded by the police.

Nor was it probable that any rescue would be attempted by any of the people standing by. They were almost all honest, well-conducted persons, more likely to assist, if need were, than to hinder the officers of justice;

and though the apprehension of the ruffians would necessarily cause some slight interruption, it need not occasion any appreciable delay, since the performers were nearly all robed and ready to take up their several positions on the appearance of the Lady Enid from the upper chamber, where her tiring women were waiting upon her.

The alderman now gave the preconcerted signal.

'Stand back, in the Queen's name! and let hanny man interfere at his peril!' he cried excitedly, as eleven or twelve policemen entered the courtyard. In a moment the ruffians were surrounded.

'Come quiet, and we'll take them gimcracks off for you.'

The men saw they were trapped. They looked sullenly round, but resistance and flight were hopeless.

The bare-footed friar was marched off first, a constable at each shoulder.

'That rope round his waist ain't hardly long enough to hang him with, but he richly deserves it, by George!' said the alderman to himself as Pitcherley disappeared.

Next after him was Hemmings, likewise attended by stout policemen.

'You merry fellows in Lincoln green will have to do without Robin Hood to-day;—ha, ha, ha, ha! It's a noosance, ain't it?'

Last of all to disappear down the corridor on his way to the police cell was Saul Wabsale. He went moodily by, still cased in complete steel, the vizored bascinet upon his head, and the magnificent emblazoned jupon belted over his armour.

No sooner had the constables conveyed him away, amid some little stir and tumult on the part of the spectators, than the clear shrill tones of a silver trumpet were heard as the Lady Enid was seen emerging from her apartment. Her palfrey was instantly brought to the foot of the staircase, the massive oak doors were flung wide open, and from ten thousand throats a deafening cheer rang out as, marshalled by the alderman and the members of the committee, the grand cavalcade, for which so much preparation had been made, was set in motion.

CHAPTER IV.

'I WILL BE A CHILD AGAIN.'

WHENEVER the day of the grand procession came round, which was once in about seven years, Davenstone always gave itself up, heart and soul, to jollity. This fact was known to all the world and his wife; and, consequently, when the carnival was held, the railways brought tens of thousands of strangers — the trains panting with double engines on account of the overflowing number of passengers—who came pouring into the city at daybreak to share in its frenzied delights.

It is usually supposed that respectability and dulness are closely allied; but this was not the case with the quaint old city we are describing. The place was eminently respectable. It relegated the 'Illustrated

Police News' and the 'penny dreadfuls' to its back streets; its Liberalism had a half-Conservative complexion; it filled all the churches and chapels on the Sunday; its inhabitants were well-dressed and orderly; its thoroughfares clean and safe. But at the same time the visitor to Davenstone would find that its pleasures were frequent and whole-hearted. In summer the town turned out to enjoy its pic-nics, cricket, boating, fishing, and open-air sports of all kinds, in which all classes joined with heartiness and mutual good-will. In the winter it solaced itself with football, hunting, public concerts, lectures, etc. etc.; so that, on the whole, if a man *must* be a provincial, he might do worse than go to live in Davenstone.

But during the 'fair week,' the city went 'fairly' mad, especially if it was to be signalised by a pageant. During those six days every one was merry to his heart's content, and fortunate if his head was not completely turned before the carnival was over.

The maddest, merriest day of all was Monday, when the cavalcade paraded the streets. It has often been declared that the Lord

Mayor's show in London never excited half so much delirium as the grand procession at Davenstone; nor did the carnival at Rome ever occasion revelry more loud and long-continued.

To-day there was a cloudless sky, a balmy south wind, and a glorious sun. All the thoroughfares were literally gorged with sight-seers flushed, hurried, frenzied, even at this early hour of eight o'clock, in their endeavours to obtain a favourable post of observation. Happy above measure were those fortunate ones who had secured positions at some window, or upon a balcony, or some hastily constructed platform! Even now you might walk upon human heads for three miles, in any direction. Pleasure-seekers swarm everywhere—upon walls, lamp-posts, roofs, and chimneys. Window-sashes from ground floor to attic have all been taken out bodily, and all the apertures are crammed with well-dressed men and women. The very battlements of the churches are covered with living beings, some of them clinging round the pinnacles. Wherever the eye turns, the city teems with eager jocund life.

A close carriage, containing Lord Garlford, the countess, and a lady whom they addressed as Mrs. Despencer, went crawling through the crowded streets as early as ten o'clock. There was a block several times from the railway station to the hotel,—indeed, they were three hours in getting through that short distance. The earl was amazed to see such a vast concourse. Peeping out of the carriage window and beholding the city gay with flags, some trailing downwards, others festooning the way, and observing himself hemmed in by multitudes of sightseers, he was reminded of his first journey on the drag. Then, the footways and the windows had all been thronged—there had been considerable crushing. But the spectacle to-day had attracted an assemblage far more immense, and the excitement was infinitely greater.

When the earl and the two ladies alighted from the carriage at the entrance to the hotel, it was close upon twelve o'clock. They were at once shown to the apartment they had secured; a chair was placed for the countess at the open window, and another for Mrs. Despencer (the lady companion), while the

lord dutifully stood behind his mother, prepared to make himself useful and agreeable; for, this morning, the novelty and animation of the scene drew him out of himself, so to speak, and he was an egotist no longer.

'You will not be critical, will you?' he said, bending over the countess with a smile. 'They have done their best to make the show amusing; let us be amused accordingly.'

'Of course, Charlie,' she replied. 'I will be a child again, if I can, and laugh and admire with the rest of them.'

'Mr. Melody, the innkeeper, is coming in, mother, presently, if you have no objection. He is a very intelligent man. He knows everything and everybody connected with this procession. I thought you would like to have him near, you know.'

'By all means, Charlie.'

For a few moments the aristocrats at the hotel window were gazed at and talked about with much interest by the crowds below and in the neighbouring houses; but very soon all eyes were turned in the direction whence the pageant was expected to appear. The hum, the tumult, the swaying to and

fro of the multitudes in the streets had become prodigious. At half-past twelve, eager anticipation had become a fever, when suddenly the cry swelled out, 'They're coming! they're coming!' The earl looked forth, but he could not see the procession yet. The echo of its myriad movements, which yet seemed rythmical, a low humming sound, and a few faint strains of music, were all the signs he could detect that the cavalcade had started from St. John's Hall.

'They're here! they're here!' was now the eager, delighted cry.

Multitudinous as the lights upon the sea or the leaves of a forest were the sounds, shapes, and colours that greeted eye and ear when that shout arose! The procession was a great distance off, but the advanced guard was in sight. Mounted policemen were coming to clear the way. Slowly and even majestically the pageant followed. How every vein, pulse, and particle of the body thrilled when the spectacle was at hand.

'Who are those lumbering fellows in armour, Charles? How unsteady they are with those pikes and battle-axes.'

'Those are the old city guards, mother.'

'Common labourers, I suppose?'

'Yes, my lady,' said the innkeeper, who had now entered the room, and was in attendance. 'We give them half-a-crown each and their beer.'

'And who is that ferocious-looking warrior riding with them, Melody?' asked the earl.

'That is St. George, my lord.'

'What! the patron saint of England?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'What had the chivalrous dragon-slayer to do with Davenstone, that *he* should be represented in this procession?'

'He was born here, my lord.'

'Born in Davenstone?' cried the countess, in amazement. 'Are you sure?'

'Yes, my lady.'

'Ah! so the authorities tell us, mother,' said the earl. 'I remember now some lines in "Percy's Reliques" that give support to the tradition. They run thus, if I am not mistaken—

"Where being in short space arrived
Unto his native dwelling-place,
Therein with his dear love he lived,
And fortune did his nuptials grace.

They many years of joy did run,
And led their lives at *Davenstone.*"'

'How charming!' said the countess. 'I am now convinced that there is ample justification for introducing him into the pageant. But listen to the bugle horns, and see those brilliant banners. How weary the poor men look with the weight of the poles. See those little children on horseback; how prettily they bow from side to side, kissing their hands.'

'They are always a favourite feature in the procession, my lady,' remarked the innkeeper. 'They are supposed to be remembrancers of the children introduced ages ago into the religious mystery plays in the character of angels.'

'They look quite angelic, certainly,' said the countess.

'They are angels with pegtops and marbles in their pockets,' responded the earl.

'Just so, my lord—he, he!'

'They are very tastefully dressed, Charles, considering that they are only poor people's children—are they not?'

'Yes, mother; that they may appear as angelic as possible.'

'The Lady Enid! the Lady Enid!' roared the crowds below and in the neighbouring windows. 'Here she is! Bravo! Hurrah! Hurrah!'

The excitement was now intense. Even the aristocrats rose to their feet and leaned eagerly forward. The countess gave one glance at the heroine, and instantly turned away her head again.

'The hussy! She is a repulsive excrescence!'

Her son did not hear the remark, the tumult was so prodigious. The countess still looked in another direction, muttering, 'The shameless, brazen-faced creature!'

'But she is the most conspicuous part of the cavalcade, mother, the central figure; there could not be a procession without her. You cannot play Hamlet and leave out the Prince of Denmark himself, you know,' said her son, who caught her last exclamation.

'But at least she might be made to look decent, Charles.'

Some half-a-hundred personages, all richly dressed in the costumes of various periods, now trotted gaily by. The reader made acquaintance with some of them in St. John's

Hall, though of course the Black Prince, Robin Hood, and Friar Tuck were absent, being at that moment safely lodged in the police cells. But there were now careering through the streets, representatives in great numbers of royal and illustrious patrons and patronesses of the quaint old town. Lace, jewels, velvet, and old armour, went flashing by, among banners, flags, pennons, and streamers of all colours and various devices. The earl could nearly touch the dancing tassels of the banners as they swung round beneath his outstretched hand.

Bands of music were coming by in quick succession, and the air was alive with tuneful strains. City guilds with appropriate banners marched past, and various benefit societies with more flags. Then come Wabsale mounted on a chesnut horse, and personating Earl Geraint. Despite his rich apparel, his jewelled girdle and flowing ringlets, the worthy butcher was sad at heart, and his head hung down with shame and sorrow because of his son, whom he had seen taken out of the courtyard by the constables. Not far behind him rode little

Sukey, her blue satin dress stained with the traces of tears. Several bright-faced 'followers' were around her, all on horseback, and each having two men ornamented with scarfs and rosettes walking with them, one at the saddle-bow the other holding the bridle-rein. These men had enough to do to keep the pretty children from falling, and to curb the restive steeds, which were frightened by the din and bustle of the pageant.

Next came a huge elephant bearing a gilded castle to represent the city arms; then a leafy car with shepherd and shepherdess; then more drums and fifes; afterwards Sir John Falstaff, Mary Queen of Scots, Jason, with a golden fleece and drawn sword, and many more performers. But still there were more behind. Louder and louder waxed the roar of voices as the procession trailed by in gorgeous colours, swaying, gliding, rolling, plunging, running, staggering, and perspiring.

The last object was an immense car on which were figures representing the four quarters of the globe. This car had lagged behind, but it now dashed madly past to

overtake the rest, and with a shout the mob in the street closed in after it and gave chase, although they must have shared the universal exhaustion on account of the long continued excitement, and the intense heat of the weather.

'You say the Mayor of Davenstone has always been opposed to this show, Charles?' said the countess as they retired from the window.

'Always, mother.'

'I agree with him. The chief gainers are the publicans. What did you say his name is?

'Andrew Eagles.'

'He is a sensible man, I should think,' remarked the countess.

'So report says; but I have never had the pleasure of meeting him.'

The earl then ordered the close carriage, telling the innkeeper that Mr. Skittler would drive the four-in-hand coach to Bayborough that afternoon, as he himself would now return home with the countess and Mrs. Despencer.

During the interval, Melody related to the

lord the incident of the morning, namely, the arrest of Saul Wabsale, Hemmings, and Pitcherley at St. John's Hall.

'The men will be brought up before Mr. Eagles to-morrow, my lord. Of course they will be committed for trial. The case is very clear against them. It came near to being a charge of murder, but fortunately young Botoner is rapidly recovering.'

'I am glad to hear it, Melody. Good afternoon.'

The earl and the two ladies then returned to their carriage, and started upon their journey to Garlford Castle.

CHAPTER V.

THE TEA-PARTY.

THE three men who had attacked Sebastian, and who had been apprehended at St. John's Hall, were brought before the magistrates of Davenstone on the following day, and the case being clear against them they were formally committed for trial at the ensuing assizes. After hearing Botoner's evidence the presiding magistrate (Mr. Eagles) characterised the assault as most wanton and unprovoked. He also stated that crimes of violence were happily very rare in the city; indeed, during the period he had been upon the bench no case so serious as the present had ever been before him, and he trusted there would never be another like it.

Sebastian had nearly recovered from the

injuries inflicted upon him. He was still weak and pale, but his heart was lighter than it had been for months. He knew that Felicia was not indifferent to him; he hoped he might win her yet. To-day he would see her once more, for this afternoon the little folks connected with Thacker's Yard were to be gathered together with sounds of rejoicing, in order to be regaled with cake, oranges, and buns; on which occasion they were to 'pipe up' and sing the original air he had composed for them. The mayor's daughter would probably be present in her capacity as a teacher—possibly he might have an opportunity of speaking to her.

Nor was our hero disappointed. There was a very large gathering in the chapel that day. Mr. Shearwater, the pastor, was in attendance, and delivered an address to the youngsters, into whose eager hands the good things mentioned were duly delivered. Sebastian's air was sung with great spirit, and created a sensation. Felicia's bright eyes were sparkling with happiness. Before the assemblage dispersed, the bold inventor and

talented composer found the fates propitious, and he obtained a brief interview with his love.

'I have been longing for this day to come,' he said, gazing into her eyes as he took her fair hand in his own.

'I was afraid you would be too unwell to be here,' she replied, with a slight shiver as she remembered in what danger his life had been.

'It was what you sent me *that day* that wrought my cure,' he said earnestly.

The maidenly crimson overspread her face, but she smiled sweetly.

'My little note, you mean?'

'Yes.'

Then she told him, with most attractive confusion, and many blushes, that she had written out the pretty air he had composed and taught them, and often played it over to herself at home. He in his turn fearlessly assured her of his love.

'Shall you be at the tea-party to-morrow?' he asked, as they were separating.

The reader may remember it had been arranged to hold one on the next day after the children's feast.

'Yes,' she replied, and then they bade each other good-bye.

Thacker's Yard was alive with bustling preparations at an early hour of the following afternoon. A committee of young people had been formed, and these now assembled in a little ante-room adjoining the spacious apartment in the court where the tea was to be held, in order to spread the tables, and cut the cake and bread and butter. Timmie Sheap was among them, also Cobb, Ivory, Slicer, and Twilight, who with their sweethearts constituted the committee on this occasion. 'The Mutual Elevators' had remained steadfast to their intention of producing the terrible tragedy of the 'Moorish Corsair's Revenge.' Their rehearsals had been frequent, and they fully expected to electrify Thacker's Yard with their histrionic ability. While they were assisting to spread the tables and cut the cake they dropped a few mysterious hints to the rosy, good-humoured girls respecting their intention.

'Good gracious! Does Mr. Shearwater know?' they asked.

'We shall tell him when he comes this afternoon,' replied Cobb with dignity; whereupon

the damsels assured him that if that 'horrid play was to be presented faithful, with all that blood and murder in it, they were sure they should scream with fright and raise the place—that they should.' The 'Mutual Elevators' gallantly replied to the effect that though their persons would be clothed with awe-inspiring majesty, yet their bosoms would be full of tenderness for the said damsels, who need not alarm themselves unnecessarily.

Mrs. Tomkin, the pew-opener, shuffled into the ante-room now and then to look after the proprieties. She was a little shrivelled old woman with a rasping voice. To-day her temper was soured, because she could not get the copper fire to light in the lower regions.

'Drat the wood an' the paper!' she said snappishly, 'it's all damp. I shall never get the water biled in time for the tea at this rate.' Then she went below again, where her anxious efforts were at length successful.

The 'Mutual Elevators' assisted their fair friends to pile up the cake and the bread and butter upon the plates, and to dispose them at the proper intervals upon the snowy table clothes in the large apartment, where

cups and saucers, full sugar basins, etc., had been already placed by Ivory and Twilight. In due time everything was in readiness, and the company began to arrive.

Grave, quiet-looking people they were, who came in by twos and threes, feeling somewhat awkward and nervous in their Sunday attire. Coy maidens and shame-faced youths, solemn weavers and sturdy shopkeepers trooped in, the men hanging their hats upon the pegs ranged along the wall. All seated themselves at the snowy tables where they sat in silence, staring blankly at the materials for a substantial tea spread before them, while Cobb and Timmie Sheap were bringing up the hissing urns from the lower regions. Sebastian Botoner now entered the room, and took his place at one of the upper tables, though at some little distance from that where Felicia would sit with her father, sister, and Mrs. Eagles. A vote of thanks was to be presented to him this evening for the services he had rendered to Thacker's Yard on the previous day. Our hero heartily wished that ceremony could have been dispensed with, but Mr. Shearwater and the committee had

insisted upon making the acknowledgment. Sebastian, however, was not now thinking about the vote of thanks, but about the mayor's daughter. He looking anxiously towards the door, awaiting her entrance.

His suspense was not of long duration, for Mr. Eagles walked in almost immediately, followed by his wife, Felicia, and Virginia.

When the Yorkshireman, who, though short of stature, lightly built, and surprisingly active in his movements, was yet a personage with a dignified, resolute bearing and keen penetrating eyes,—when the Yorkshireman appeared in the doorway, he noticed, with much inward gratification that every one turned towards him a glance of respectful welcome. With head erect, the energetic deacon stepped quickly forward, proud of his position, his wife, and his two daughters.

The lady mayoress looked, if possible, more buxom and rosy than ever. Her substantial person was loaded with lace, silks, and jewellery.

Felicia's winning, animated countenance was the very picture of happiness. She had already singled out our hero and sent a tele-

graphic flash towards him, which he had seen and understood.

But when the lovely form of Virginia came within their view a thrill of admiration passed through the assembly. Never before had she looked so superlatively handsome. The amiable girl had always been beloved by these people for her gentle disposition. To-day their hearts were drawn closer to her than ever. Some of them almost worshipped her; she seemed to them a bright vision from heaven. There was no man in Davenstone worthy to wed a woman of such grace, dignity, and goodness.

When the three ladies and the mayor had taken their seats at the uppermost table, some surprise was expressed by the company that Mr. Shearwater had not yet come. The pastor was usually early at these gatherings. What could have detained him? It was now past the hour fixed for the tea; but it would hardly be seemly to begin until the minister had arrived.

While they were still anxiously discussing the possible reasons of his absence—those ladies who had been appointed to preside

at the tables being seated before the steaming urns waiting to pour out the fragrant beverage—the voice of Mr. Shearwater was heard upon the outer stairs. He was evidently conversing with some one as he ascended. He now entered the apartment, bowing from side to side as he advanced, and apologising for the lateness of his arrival.

But who was that distinguished-looking stranger who accompanied him? The good people of Thacker's Yard had never before seen such a person, or one in the least resembling him. He was a young man of about thirty years, tall and broad-chested, attired from head to foot in a suit of claret coloured velvet! He wore long waving dark hair and a bushy beard, and carried, crushed up in his right hand, a broad brimmed, high crowned, soft felt hat. He was an artist evidently. He kept close to the minister, and when the latter reached the chief table, and began shaking hands with the three ladies and Mr. Eagles, the stranger still stood at his elbow as if earnestly desiring an introduction to the family party.

'This is my friend Mr. Dangerfield,' said the pastor, indicating the stranger with his gold eyeglass; and a formal introduction followed.

'My friend is an artist from London,' pursued Mr. Shearwater, when he had said grace, and renewed his apologies for being late. 'He is on the staff of the—the—'

'The Picturesque,' prompted the artist, with a smile.

'Oh yes! exactly—that high-class illustrated weekly journal, you know, Mr. Eagles, which has become such an universal favourite with the public.'

'Oh, indeed,' responded the mayor. By this time they were all seated at the table, and the business of tea had commenced in earnest. Virginia presided at the urn, having Mr. Shearwater at her right hand, and Mr. Dangerfield on her left, while Felicia sat next to the minister and the Yorkshireman by the side of the artist. Mrs. Eagles was lower down, having relegated her duties to her eldest daughter, since she preferred chatting at her ease with the minister's wife, a quiet, middle-aged person, who was pouring out the tea at the second table.

'I am sorry to say,' remarked Mr. Dangerfield, speaking to Virginia, 'that it was through my fault Mr. Shearwater was not in time this afternoon.'

'Was it? It is good of you to wish the blame to be laid upon the right person,' replied the lovely girl, with her habitual simplicity.

'Shall I tell you how it was? I asked him to be kind enough to bring me with him, as I very much wished to come; and I promised to call for him at four o'clock. Unfortunately I was half-an-hour late. You should scold me well.'

'I am sure I shall not scold you,' said Virginia, with a faint blush.

'Shall I tell you why I have come down to Davenstone?' pursued the artist. 'The managers of "The Picturesque" sent me down expressly to make drawings of your grand procession.'

'Indeed! I should so like to see them.'

'Unfortunately they were sent up to London this afternoon. It was because I stayed to put the finishing touches to them that my happiness was delayed for half-an-hour. The happiness of being at this tea-party, I mean.'

The innocent beauty, who herself painted a little, as we know, and who was passionately fond of everything connected with the fine arts, listened with eagerness to these items of news. Mr. Dangerfield could not have chosen any more direct means of gaining her gentle heart than those he had adopted.

'Then your drawings will appear in "The Picturesque," of course?' said she.

'Yes. Shall I tell you when? They may possibly be in next Saturday's impression; but if not, then certainly in the week after.'

'How nice! I shall be so impatient to see them!'

During this time the artist was waiting upon Virginia with the utmost assiduity, passing the cups to and fro, dispensing sugar and cream; in short, giving his undivided attention to her and the occupation in which she was engaged.

'I shall remain in Davenstone for some weeks, I hope,' said he. 'They have instructed me to make sketches of various places of interest in the city, so that I shall be engaged here for a considerable time yet.'

'And will those sketches also be published in "The Picturesque"?'

'Yes; at some time or other, but probably not immediately.'

'What delightful duty!' exclaimed the lovely girl. 'If I were a man it is just the life I should choose.'

'Yes, but I feel sadly the want of a settled home. I have to be continually moving from one lodging to another. I am at present staying at "The Golden Horse Hotel" in your town. But, of course, an unmarried man like myself has but few traps to carry about.'

The tea was now over. At a signal from Mr. Shearwater the company rose to their feet and the minister returned thanks. He then gave directions for tables to be cleared and forms arranged for the songs and speeches that were to follow, and was then about to address a private remark to Mr. Dangerfield, when our friend Cobb, the 'Mutual Elevator,' came up, and with a mysterious air drew him apart for conversation.

CHAPTER VI.

A FULL-DRESS REHEARSAL.

COBB drew the minister aside, and lowering his voice to a whisper, that he might not be overheard by any person standing by, said,—

'The Mutual Elevators hasn't seen you at any of their meetin's lately, sir.'

'Well, no—'

'I shouldn't mention it, sir, only it was you as started us, and you said as you wished us good success.'

'Certainly, and—'

'You see, sir,' continued Cobb, 'we've prepared a piece to give to the company this evenin', but seein' as you didn't honour us at any of our re'ersals, you naterally didn't know anythin' about it.'

'A piece, Mr. Cobb?'

'Yes, sir; a kind o' play, you know, which we've prepared, to give it for the hentertainment of this tea-party.'

'But, Mr. Cobb, I am afraid—'

'This is the title of the piece, sir, if you will be so good as to look at it; and I wish to say that we all think it very good.

The bold bumptious one here handed a paper to Mr. Shearwater, which he read as follows:—

THE MOORISH CORSAIR'S REVENGE!!!

Dramatis Personæ.

Mr. COBB.....Cid Hamet Benengeli.
Mr. IVORY.....Zorayda.
Mr. SLICER .....Don Fernando.
Mr. SHEAP } ..... Pirates.
Mr. TWILIGHT }

'I am sorry, Mr. Cobb,' said the pastor, 'but I cannot permit this to be given. Many of my people would not like it; there will not be time for it either, for I have already drawn up the programme for this evening; and you gave me no notice of your intention, consequently I am quite unprepared for anything of the kind.'

'We've spent a good deal of time and

trouble over it, sir, besides the expense,' said Cobb. 'I'm sure the Mutual Elevators will all be offended and hurt if you don't allow it to be given. We've got all the fancy dresses ready in the room below.'

'Have you?'

'Yes, sir; and they sent me up to name it to you. They're waitin' to dress 'emselves up for their parts.'

Mr. Shearwater shook his head, but the bold bumptious one still persevered.

'There is no harm in the play, sir; you would like it if you heard us, I'm sure. You might come down to us while they're gettin' this room ready, and we'll recite some of it over for you. Do now.'

'It would be useless, Mr. Cobb.'

'Never mind, sir, if it is; but do just step down and hear a bit of it. You've got a quarter of an hour to spare before the business of the evenin' begins.'

'Very well, I will come.'

'Thank you, sir; we will be ready for you in three minutes,' said Cobb, who hastened off to his associates, to prepare them for the unexpected rehearsal.

The lower room where the Mutual Elevators were waiting was that in which stood Mrs. Tomkin's coppers, recently full of boiling water for the tea. Dense clouds of steam were floating about and the atmosphere was heavy with the fumes of that favourite beverage, a good deal of which lay spilt upon the floor. In one corner was a heap of lumber, and the empty urns had just been deposited in another.

Cobb delivered his message, and straightway the masqueraders indued themselves in their dresses, in order to rehearse the tragedy in the presence of the minister. Slicer put on the jack-boots, plumed hat, and yellow jacket of the Spanish knight; Ivory apparelled himself for the part of Zorayda, while the bold bumptious one, having rubbed some charcoal over his amiable visage, and wreathed a silken turban around his dusky brow, grasped the wooden scimitar and stood forth as the Cid Hamet Benengeli.

Mr. Shearwater now stepped into the room, but the vapour from the coppers instantly settled upon his gold eye-glasses and obscured his vision. He took them off, wiped

them carefully, and then the performance commenced.

'Drat them b'ys!' said Mrs. Tomkin, who stood by her coppers wiping her fiery face with her apron; 'with their mummeries and flummeries! 'Them urns is half full of bilin' tay. They'd better be careful.'

The ruthless Moor had seized Zorayda by her back hair, and was dragging her towards his cave, which was formed of the tea-urns already mentioned.

'You b'ys will be scalded if you don't look out!' cried Mrs. Tomkin. Thus admonished the masqueraders moved to a safer distance, and a fearful struggle ensued.

'Spare, oh! spare me! noble corsair,
Spa-a-r-re!'

roared Ivory, amid a scene of indescribable confusion.

'Release thy hold,
Thou pirate bold;
Drag not that lady by the ha-a-i-i-r!'

cried the gallant Spanish knight, rushing to the rescue. But the ruthless Moor, brandishing his wooden scimitar, bellowed,

'Rivers of blood-d-d will I now shed!
On thy devoted worthless head-d
My sword shall—'

A trayful of buns was here overturned in the heat of the conflict, and precipitated into a large can of warm water. Three or four urns were rolling about. Slicer lost his balance and fell over one of them, bringing Ivory and Cobb down with him. They lay in a lake of tepid tea; while the lumber in the corner having been dislodged in the scuffle, came tumbling down on the top of them.

Mr. Shearwater escaped and fled upstairs, thankful that this misadventure had relieved him of the necessity of refusing to allow the play to be enacted before the company. The 'Mutual Elevators' would now be glad to go home to put on dry clothes, and probably would not show their faces again that night.

The large apartment had by this time been arranged for the after-meeting, which forthwith began. The minister made a speech, which was loudly applauded. He also called upon several other pastors of the town, who were present to support him; and these in their turn contributed to the enjoyment and profit of the good folks of Thacker's Yard. There was a little music, too, besides various recitations

of a humorous character; and then the chairman called upon Mr. Eagles.

The mayor rose, and spoke a few weighty words upon the advantages of sobriety, thrift, and industry, and then proceeded as follows:—

'I have great pleasure in moving that the thanks of this meeting are due and are hereby given to Mr. Sebastian Botoner for the valuable services he has rendered to this society in the capacity of choir leader during the past year. (Hear, hear.) Particular mention should, I think, be made of the singular talent shown, and the great pains and trouble bestowed by our young friend in connection with the children's feast held yesterday. (Applause.) I understand that the air sung by the little ones on that occasion was a new and original one, the composition of Mr. Botoner himself. Most of us had the pleasure of hearing it, and I believe I express the opinion of this assemblage when I say that his composition does him infinite credit. (Hear, hear.) I trust we may have the happiness of hearing his pretty tune very frequently at Thacker's Yard. (Hear.) Our young friend undoubtedly possesses musical ability of a high order.

'I scarcely need tell you that Mr. Botoner's services have been entirely gratuitous. He has devoted himself heart and soul to this good work without the slightest fee or reward. Indeed, were payment offered to him I doubt if he would accept it. I will only add that his various acquirements and the great force of character he has ever displayed, have won universal esteem and respect. I hope he will allow me, before I sit down, to congratulate him most heartily upon his providential escape the other night when wantonly and brutally attacked. (Hear, hear.) His assailants will no doubt in due time receive the punishment they deserve. May his life long be spared, and may his career in the future be as successful as it will undoubtedly be honourable!' (Applause.)

Felicia's heart was full of rapture when her father spoke in these warm terms of him who was in truth her soul's idol. She glanced at Sebastian, and seeing the flush of mingled modesty and gratification mantling over his brow, and that his eyes were fastened upon *her*, she felt prouder and happier than ever.

The vote of thanks proposed by Mr.

Eagles was promptly seconded by another of the deacons, and adopted by the meeting with acclamation.

Our hero returned thanks modestly and briefly, resuming his seat almost immediately. He was not a ready speaker, we must confess; but an impressive personality and an intellect bold and original will always produce an irresistible effect. Though a visionary in the estimation of some, all acknowledged the simplicity, honesty, and indescribable earnestness of his character. The reader will understand what manner of man he was if we term him the Aristides of Thacker's Yard.

When Sebastian had sat down, the business of the meeting was soon concluded, and the assembly began to disperse.

Mr. Dangerfield had remained close to Virginia during the whole of the evening, paying to the lovely girl such marked attention, and devoting himself to her with so much perseverance as to attract the notice of all the persons seated in their neighbourhood. The soft glances, the smiles, the confidential whisperings had been observed by her father among the rest; but on the whole the Yorkshireman

had not been ill pleased by what he saw. Sooth to say, the easy bearing and distinguished appearance of the artist had given him the opinion that he was a thorough gentleman. Evidently he was a man who obtained a good income by his profession. He stood high in the estimation of the editors of the 'Picturesque.' He was a person of good character, too, for he was Mr. Shearwater's friend. If his daughter had a fancy for him, and if everything appertaining to him stood the test of inquiry and investigation, why, he should have no objection to the match. Generally speaking, the mayor felt a Spartan contempt for all the brethren of the brush. Hosts of them had been suppliants to him, anxious to sell the fruit of their toil and skill for a beggarly sum. He bought their pictures; but some of the men he did not consider worthy to put their legs under his mahogany. But Mr. Dangerfield was an artist of a superior type—a prosperous, highly respectable man—not a roisterer either, as too many of those painters were, but steady, sober, religious.

On these grounds he had been polite and

affable to the stranger, though the words spoken between them had been very few.

'I understand, Mr. Dangerfield,' said the mayor, when they had all risen from their seats, and were preparing to follow the rest of the company out of the room,—'I understand from our worthy pastor that you were sent down to Davenstone to make sketches of the grand procession held here on Monday?'

'Exactly so,' returned the artist, unabashed and self-possessed as ever under the Yorkshireman's piercing glance. He smiled and bowed gracefully, while making this reply, as if quite accustomed to the society of civic dignitaries.

'It would make a good picture, no doubt,' remarked Mr. Eagles. His wife was walking down the apartment with the minister and Mrs. Shearwater, while Virginia and Felicia were a little in the rear. 'It would make a good picture, but the pageant itself ought to be abolished. The only persons who benefit by it are the publicans. Your stay in the town will be short, I suppose?'

'Well, I shall probably remain a few weeks, as I have drawings to make of the

ruins of your cathedral and city walls, St. Peter's and Trinity, the Lazar House, the ancient Cross, St. John's Hall, your quaint old hospitals, and other places.'

'For the "Picturesque?"'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Dangerfield.

'I am glad to hear it,' said the mayor. 'Our city possesses features peculiarly interesting to the artist—'

'And the antiquary,' put in Mr. Shearwater, for they were now all grouped at the foot of the stairs that led into Thacker's Yard.

'And also the architect and historical student,' added the lady mayoress.

'The attractions of Davenstone,' continued Mr. Eagles, 'in a commercial point of view, likewise, are not by any means insignificant.'

'Its tasteful ribbon manufactures (shown by the beautiful book-marks and other samples of textile industry made here), its watch making, art metal works, and bicycle works—'

Felicia was looking round eagerly for *her* bicycle maker, and seeing him in the shadow of the court with two or three others, she bade him good-night with her eyes.

'And bicycle works,' continued the mayor,—

'all indicate the occupations of a population possessed of much taste and mechanical skill.'

Mr. Dangerfield had appeared to listen with exemplary patience to this lecture, but in reality his attention was absorbed in the gentle Virginia, who with her sister stood by waiting for the mayor to cease talking.

'This is the happiest evening I ever spent in my life,' were the parting words addressed to her by the artist as they shook hands.

'I have enjoyed the meeting, too,' replied the lovely girl, with a smile.

'Well, good-night, Mr. Dangerfield,' said the mayor, 'I am glad to have met you. Where are you staying?'

'At the Golden Horse.'

'Ah! to be sure. We shall see you again, I dare say. Good-night.'

CHAPTER VII.

VANITY FAIR.

HAVING parted from Mr. Dangerfield and the minister at the large iron gates which stood at the entrance to Thacker's Yard, the mayor and his family entered the carriage in waiting for them, and drove homewards. They talked a good deal together about their new acquaintance—his personal appearance, the terms on which he stood with Mr. Shearwater, his profession, and the illustrations that were forthcoming in 'The Picturesque.' It was quite clear that the artist had produced a favourable impression upon the lady mayoress and Mr. Eagles; and though Felicia was a little less outspoken in her praises and seemed reluctant to pronounce any opinion at all respecting the stranger, yet even she had no

disparaging word to say against him. Virginia was almost entirely silent; but her glowing cheeks and kindling eyes showed how keen was the interest she took in the subject of conversation.

Buxom, rosy Mrs. Eagles was almost rapturous in her encomiums. There never was such a finished, complete gentleman; was there now? His bearing was so graceful; his voice so agreeable; clear as a bell, pure in tone, and every syllable so correctly pronounced! His address altogether was so pleasing! 'Felicia,' said the simple old lady, 'did you ever see a gentleman with such easy, elegant manners? Did you not admire him very much?'

Felicia replied that she had not yet made up her mind whether she liked him or not. She had not noticed him particularly, but he seemed to wear a good deal of hair upon his face, and it was a pity to hide good features in that way.'

'Artists always wear long hair and bushy beards, you know,' said the lady mayoress.

'I wasn't aware that Shearwater had an acquaintance of that kind,' remarked Mr.

Eagles. 'I wonder how he came to know him?'

'They may be related to one another, Andrew,' rejoined his wife.

'No; he introduced him as *his friend.*'

'An unlikely man altogether for a Dissenting minister to be intimate with, I should think, papa,' said Felicia.

'Not at all,' was the mayor's response.

'We must know more of him,' said Mrs. Eagles. 'You had better ask him to dinner, Andrew.'

'Not yet; I must speak to Shearwater about him first.'

'As you please, Andrew; but he is evidently a gentleman whose acquaintance it is desirable to cultivate.'

'You seem marvellously taken with him,' said the mayor.

'I am; and besides, being in a strange town he will be glad of a little society. It will be a charity to ask him.'

By this time they had reached home, and no more was said about Mr. Dangerfield that evening.

The next day was Thursday, the last day

of the great pleasure fair at Davenstone. At the breakfast table Mr. Eagles told his family that he should be able to breathe freely when the intolerable nuisance was over. Fairs ought to be abolished, he said. They were no longer needed.

'Anciently,' said this autocrat of the breakfast table, who was somewhat given to prosing, 'before any flourishing towns were established, and the necessaries or ornaments of life, from the convenience of communication and the increase of provincial towns, could be procured in various places — anciently, I say, goods and commodities of every kind were chiefly sold at fairs.'

'Were they really, Andrew! Gracious me, I never knew that before!' exclaimed the lady mayoress.

'To these fairs,' continued Mr. Eagles, in a severe tone, for he was not altogether pleased with the interruption; 'to these fairs, as to one universal mart, the people resorted periodically, and supplied most of their wants for the ensuing year. Warton, in his "History of English Poetry," has given us a curious account of that of St. Giles Hill,

near Winchester. As late as 1512, as we learn from the Northumberland Household Book, fairs still continued to be the principal marts for purchasing necessaries in large quantities, which are now supplied by the numerous trading towns.'

'Then provisions and smaller necessaries have given place to horses, pigs, oxen, and sheep—eh, papa?' suggested Virginia, with a smile.

'Not forgetting the gingerbreads sold in the bazaars,' added Felicia, gaily.

'Exactly,' said the grave and sagacious mayor. 'In Europe, fairs are now generally held for the sale of goods in which there is a frequent change of fashion, for the sale of cattle, or solely for pleasure. Provisions are seldom sold, except in places on the outskirts of civilisation. I have myself seen,' he added, proudly, 'the two greatest fairs in the world.'

'Which were they, Andrew?' asked his wife.

'The Michaelmas fair at Leipzig, and the Easter fair at Frankfort-on-the-Maine. I have also seen that which comes next in

extent and duration, I mean the fair of St. Peter and St. Paul at Nishni-Novogorod, in Russia, which is frequented by about two hundred thousand buyers and sellers from different parts of Europe and of Northern and Central Asia; and I have heard it stated that commodities to the amount of four millions pounds are annually disposed of.'

'Good gracious! what an immense sum!' said the lady mayoress.

'There are other great fairs which I have *not* seen,' Mr. Eagles went on, with the same dry manner; 'for example, those at Brunswick, Pesth in Hungary, Beaucaire and Lyons, Tanta in Upper Egypt, Mecca, and Hurdwar in India. But, as I said before, the necessity for these fairs, in England at least, has passed away, and I am glad to see that they are gradually decreasing in number and importance. Those really of use are chiefly for the sale of cattle, and of the annual produce of pastoral districts. The prevalence of good roads, the improved communication between towns and villages, the increase of populous towns, and other re-

sults of advanced civilisation, have rendered them, in a mercantile sense, useless. Pleasure fairs are fast becoming extinct, and I rejoice to observe it. I shall have no rest until ours at Davenstone has shared the fate of those already defunct.'

'What an energetic spirit you have, Andrew, to be sure!' said his admiring spouse.

'But, papa,' said Felicia, 'to-day being the last day of the fair this year, and this being probably the last year in which such a carnival will he held in our town—'

'I trust it may prove so,' said Mr. Eagles with great fervour.

'I want you, papa, to let me take just one peep at the bazaar before it is all over. The bazaar, you know, is quite on the outskirts of the fair, and one may walk about and admire the toys and the sweets and the pretty nick-nacks without going among the shows and the rowdies. If you will let Virginia and me go this afternoon, we will promise to be most discreet; and the bazaar really is unobjectionable,—isn't it?'

'Quite, Andrew, I should think,' said the mayoress, turning to her husband. 'The most

respectable people are found there. I should not mind going with the girls, if you thought well, to take care of them, and keep them out of mischief. Do let them go.'

After some appearance of reluctance, the stout Yorkshireman gave his consent. His two daughters, therefore, after an early luncheon, attired themselves with great glee—as did rosy, buxom Mrs. Eagles likewise, and they all started for the green to behold some of the vanities thereof.

'Papa limits us to the bazaar,' said Felicia, airily, as they walked along; 'but other respectable people of the strictest principles draw the line at the wild-beast show.'

'Do you refer to any of our friends at Thacker's Yard?' asked the mayoress.

'Yes, to our guide and pattern himself. I do, indeed.'

'Not Mr. Shearwater?'

'The very same. He was seen coming out of the wild-beast show the day before yesterday. And where was the harm? I'm sure I should like to go myself. But papa is so strict.'

'It is not the wild-beast show he objects

to, Felicia,' said Mrs, Eagles, 'but the associations of the fair—the buffoonery, gambling, profane language, and so forth. No serious person would wish to be in such a crowd, I am sure. You may depend you were misinformed about Mr. Shearwater.'

'Perhaps I was; but do let us get out of this mob of people. I never saw the streets so thronged in my life.'

They were walking along Cross Cheaping, which lay on their way to 'the Green.' Hundreds of men and women, dressed in their best, were either going to or returning from the fair, most of them with children of all sizes and ages, many of whom were holding toys in their arms or dragging them on the pavement. The air was alive with laughter, animation, fun, and rattle.

'It is quite bewildering,' said Virginia, who in her secret soul would have preferred to be to be at home engaged with her embroidery or her painting.

'Let us stand for a moment upon this doorstep,' said the lively Felicia, 'and count how many bands of music there are close by, all playing different airs at the same time. One

two, three, four, five, *six*, I can see, all trying which can make the most noise. It is enough to take one's senses away.'

'You haven't counted the barrel organs, Felicia, and the hurdy-gurdies—all helping to swell the din,' said her sister.

'We shall go distracted if we stay; let us hurry on,' added the mayoress.

They passed down Hertford Street, and soon the booths on the Green were in sight. Making a detour along two or three by-streets, in order to elude observation as much as possible, and to escape the mob, the ladies emerged again just opposite the principal opening to the bazaar, which they hurriedly entered.

'I trust none of the Thacker's Yard people have seen us,' said Mrs. Eagles, looking around apprehensively. 'I feel ashamed—quite guilty, in fact. But we will not venture among the shows; we will walk up and down here for a short time and then return home.'

So they sauntered leisurely along between the rows of stalls and colossal canisters heaped high with gingerbreads, admiring the

toys and watching the buyers and sellers. No doubt the happy children around them who were so eager in choosing their playthings, upon which the sun, shining through the coloured roof cast all the tints of the rainbow, thought the place a very Aladdin's palace for gorgeousness. Very likely their fancy could not conceive of anything more exquisite. Even the lady mayoress was charmed, notwithstanding her uneasiness.

Having made a few purchases at the farther end of the bazaar, our party actually took one peep from the opening at the varieties outside. The fun of the fair was now in its zenith. Steam circuses were careering wildly, the boys whipping their wooden horses, and the girls laughing or languishing in the wonderful circling cars. The shooting galleries, and the proprietors of 'Aunt Sally,' were driving a roaring trade. The performing dogs, the fat lady, the photographic studios, the drinking booths, and the various shows, were all being liberally patronised; while the clown and harlequin and the painted ladies and gentlemen in spangles and tights were attracting vast crowds. Oh, what

a clanging of cymbals; what a blaring of trumpets; what a banging of big drums! The crack of firearms, the roar of wild beasts in the menageries, the crushing, the jostling, the laughing and shouting, and the multitudinous din altogether, fairly made Mrs. Eagles tremble, and she pulled Felicia by the skirts, saying, 'Let us go home!'

They had not ventured on the forbidden ground, but stood in the shadow of the bazaar. A steam circus was close by, however, and they noticed several ragged urchins, who were casting longing looks at the fiery wooden steeds, but who apparently had not the necessary halfpenny to purchase a ride. Upon these impecunious ones the gentle Virginia took pity.

'Let us treat the dear little fellows,' she said to her companions, and the urchins were forthwith lifted into the empty saddles; the bell rang, and the circus was put in motion. Virginia stood very near to it, intent upon the happy faces of the children. No one had observed that one of the iron bars upon which the horses were suspended had become loosened from its fastening at the top. The

circus moved round, each moment increasing its velocity. Its speed was at the greatest when suddenly the iron bar snapped, as it whirled quick as lightning past the lovely girl. It was descending upon her, and would have struck her a dangerous blow; but at that instant a strong hand was stretched out and caught it, while a cry of alarm burst from the lips of the bystanders. Virginia was saved. She turned to look upon her preserver—it was Mr. Dangerfield. Her confusion was indescribable. The artist raised his hat with composure and congratulated her upon her escape.

'It would have killed her, Mr. Dangerfield but for your providential interposition,' cried the excited mayoress, rushing forward, followed by the trembling Felicia.

'I am glad I was in time,' said the artist, smiling.

'How can we thank you enough,' responded Mrs. Eagles fervently The two girls murmured their gratitude likewise, but Virginia, though her large dark eyes were eloquent with intense feeling, yet spoke less

than her sister. They all walked away together, and the mayoress said,—

'We shall be very pleased if you will come and dine with us to-morrow, Mr. Dangerfield?'

The artist thanked her, and accepted the invitation, looking a fine manly fellow in that claret-coloured velvet suit of his.

CHAPTER VIII.

'A SPECIAL ARTIST, MY LORD.'

MR. PEPPER, whose place of business, as the reader may remember, was next door to the Lady Enid Hotel, had been dead nearly a week at the time treated of in the last chapter, and the passion for acquiring property, which was so strong in the landlord of the above-named hostelry, had received a new stimulus. The house upon which Mr. Melody had cast longing eyes for so many months was now in the market. A grand opportunity was therefore presented of purchasing it, and of widening the inn-yard. Many anxious consultations did the landlord hold with his wife upon this important subject. The following conversation will show the plan they decided to adopt:—

'Well, my dear,' said Melody one day

when he and his better half were closeted together in their private room, having snatched a brief interval of quiet from the hurry and turmoil of business, 'what would you advise me to do? The house next door will be put up at auction on the 29th of this month. Here is one of the printed bills announcing the sale.'

His wife received it from his outstretched hand, and they proceeded to con it over very carefully. The premises in question formed a small part only of the property advertised, the deceased Mr. Pepper having been a man of some substance. Pretty Mrs. Melody was immersed in thought for some few moments, then she said,—

'You are always fortunate, Nat, in whatever you undertake, and when you make up your mind to buy, you manage to get a bargain invariably—'

'You know where the secret lies, my love,' remarked her husband.

'Where?' she asked with a smile.

'Why, in the first place, I usually look before I leap—'

'Yes—that you do.'

'And, in the second place' (pinching her ear), 'I have such a wise little woman to help me in everything.'

'Nat, I suppose you mean to buy it?'

'I think we may safely do so, my dear,' he replied.

Mrs. Melody was quite aware that such a prudent man as her husband—one who habitually forecasted and provided for every contingency—would not attempt anything impracticable, so she said in a firm undertone, 'I think so too.'

'You see, my love,' he went on, 'this hotel is our freehold. I have paid for it, and I hold the deeds. We must borrow the money upon that security.

'Whom shall you ask to lend the money, Nat?'

'I think, my dear, I had better get it from the bank. They will accommodate me, I have no doubt, if I deposit the deeds with them. Mr. Hartopp told me I might have a loan to any amount at any time.'

'Perhaps that will be the best plan,' said Mrs. Melody, with a sigh. 'How much shall you be likely to want, Nat?'

'It will depend, of course, my love, upon the price the house next door will fetch. I think I shall get it for a thousand pounds or so, if all goes well, and then, with care and economy (you are a pattern in household management as in everything else), we shall be able in a very few years to redeem these premises by paying back the whole of the purchase money to the bank. Think how well off we shall be *then*, my dear. This inn will be ours, and Pepper's house, too!'

'Yes, Nat, it will be very nice.'

'Of course, my love, we shall have to be exceedingly cautious, and not let it be known that we mean to purchase,' continued her husband. 'We must keep our own counsel as we did before, when I bought *this* property. If it should become generally known that I *must* have Pepper's house, they will make me pay dearly for it. I had better keep in the background, as I did in that instance; don't you think so?'

'Certainly, Nat. Get Valentine to attend the auction and bid for you. He managed so well the last time, and he is very good

natured, he will do anything to serve you or any one else.'

'All right, my dear,' said Melody. 'He is a little hot-headed, but he will answer our purpose, as we do not wish to take any one else into our confidence.' After a pause the innkeeper added, in a tone of slight pique, 'Pepper's executors might have done me a good turn, and had the auction in my sale-room here; but you see they have preferred to patronise one of my rivals.' He pointed as he spoke to the heading of the printed announcement lying on the table. 'You perceive, my dear, that the sale is to take place at the Golden Horse Hotel.'

Yes, there it was in large letters—'*The Golden Horse Hotel.*'

'Never mind, Nat; we are doing quite as much business as they are.'

'More, my love. Twice as much, I should say.' And so the conversation ended.

In the course of the day the landlord spoke confidentially to our friend Laxey upon the subject of the coming auction, and the councillor readily undertook the delicate

business of acting as proxy upon the occasion. He was admonished by Melody to be as close as the grave, and as cool as a judge, but on no account to let any person outbid him. 'I *must* have the property, Val. It must be knocked down to me, if it goes at all reasonable,' said the wary innkeeper.

Laxey gave the required promises with his usual sprightliness, amusing his friend at the same time by a passionate denunciation of the selfishness of auctioneers, who were mimicked very cleverly. With a most impassioned manner Laxey also condemned those dummies at auction rooms who never opened their mouths to bid, but sat swallowing the vendor's wine with the utmost relish. 'What with the dummies, and the cost of advertising, and the auctioneer's charges,—bah! how grandly *he* will stalk into the room with a bundle of bills under his arm—so! and fling them on the table like so much waste paper,—though they will cost the vendor a pretty sum!—and perhaps there won't be a bid after all! — I say, between them all they bring the expenses

up finely!! It makes me mad when I see men so cold-blooded.' And the gamesome councillor walked off as he spoke, probably to play some practical joke upon one of his acquaintance.

Not, however, before he had seen Rose, and exchanged a few tender words with her. The innkeeper's daughter loved him with all her heart, and though the wedding day was not fixed—for Mrs. Melody said she was too young yet—it was understood that they were to be married in the course of the following year.

When Laxey left the inn it was nearly twelve o'clock, the hour at which Lord Garlford's coach generally arrived from Bayborough. Melody walked down to the stables to see that all was in readiness for its reception. He knew that the earl was extremely particular and critical in regard to cleanliness, neatness, and the comfort of his thoroughbreds, and the innkeeper wished to continue to give satisfaction. It was probable, though not certain, that the lord would come in person to-day. It was true that of late he had not tooled the drag

with so much regularity as at the beginning, Bob Skittler sometimes—indeed rather frequently — appearing on the box as his deputy. Melody had noticed, too, that the earl did not now take so lively an interest in the coach as he had formerly done, though he had taken the trouble to telegraph from London once or twice when unable to drive, hoping that the team would start *punctually*—a point on which the lord invariably insisted very strongly. For some days past it had been remarked, when the noble coachman made his appearance at the Lady Enid, that he was absent-minded, and betrayed considerable restlessness. On these accounts it was supposed that he was becoming tired of his undertaking (probably because it did not prove so successful in a commercial point of view as he had hoped), and would shortly relinquish it altogether.

'Look sharp, Sam,' said Melody to the head ostler, who with two other men was busy about the harness-room and sweeping the stalls in the stables; 'his lordship will be here in ten minutes.'

The men bustled about, completing their preparations, while the innkeeper walked down to the bottom of the inn-yard, casting his watchful eye in all directions. He stopped before the great gate which formed the back entrance to the yard, and which looked out upon an unfrequented by-street. It stood wide open as usual; but very few persons were known to go out or come in by this entrance.

'Sam,' said Melody,

'Yes, sir,' replied the ostler, coming up.

'You'd better keep this gate shut and fastened.'

'Very well, sir.'

'While this pleasure fair is in the town,' continued the blackbearded innkeeper, 'it isn't safe to have it standing open all day long. There are so many bad characters about the streets just now, one doesn't know but somebody might creep into the hotel by the back way and be out again without being noticed.'

'You're right, sir,' said the ostler. 'There's a many queer strangers in Davenstone this week. I'll see to it, sir.'

'Do. Keep it closed and fastened for the future, Sam.'

The landlord then walked back again, and glancing towards the front entrance to the yard, he saw that the idlers congregated there were all looking eagerly down the street leading in the direction of Bayborough, as though they saw the coach coming. The cheerful sound of the horn heard at the same time proved this to be the case.

'Be alive, men!' cried Melody to his assistants, 'his lordship is here!'

The same instant the drag swept round under the archway in grand style, while the loafers raised a faint cheer, for the earl was indeed upon the box.

The innkeeper lifted his hat as the lord dismounted with his usual composure; while the passengers from Bayborough poured into the hotel. The ostlers unharnessed the noble greys (which had not turned a hair with the journey, but expelled the hot breath from their nostrils in a scornful manner), and led them away to the stables.

'Your lordship's private room is ready,' said Melody, obsequiously.

The earl acknowleged his attention with a slight bow, and passed in, going up the stairs

with a thoughtful and pre-occupied air. Presently his bell rang, and the landlord went up to answer it in person, receiving the order for a bottle of champagne and biscuits. Melody fetched them with alacrity, and placed them with his own deft fingers upon the little black shining oak table that stood in the middle of the room. His noble guest had seated himself in an easy chair, taken out his cigar case, and was proceeding to smoke. He looked slightly careworn, and cast his eyes restlessly from side to side, stroking his silken moustache in an absent manner. He looked up as the innkeeper was about to retire, and said,—

'This is a busy week with you, Melody.'

'It is, my lord. The fair time always brings me a good many extra customers. If my hotel was as large again, your lordship, there wouldn't be enough accommodation for them.'

'I dare say not, Melody.'

'Has your lordship been on the Green to see the fair?' asked the innkeeper, who had not accompanied the earl upon his daily excursions through the town for the last week

or so. 'Excuse my being so bold as to ask, my lord; but I thought you might perhaps have amused yourself by just having a peep. Four hours is a long time to have to wait here, your lordship, before the coach can start again; and a nobleman wants a little amusement now and then, like the rest of us.'

'I did ramble in that direction once, Melody,' replied the lord, with a yawn, 'but the fun was so awfully slow, I couldn't stand it, and soon walked away again.'

'I hope your lordship was pleased with the procession on Monday?' said the innkeeper.

'Yes. That was highly creditable to the town, Melody;—well got up, and really amusing.'

'We did not spare trouble or expense, my lord. The committee worked very hard, Alderman Jeffard especially. He threw all his heart into it, your lordship, and will feel proud when I tell him your lordship's opinion. There couldn't have been less than half-a-million people in the town that day, my lord, to see it. They came from all parts. The London papers sent reporters down express

to describe it, your lordship, and some artists came as well.'

'Indeed.'

'Yes, my lord. There is to be a great picture of the procession in one of the very best London journals. It will come out either this week or next.'

'What journal is that, Melody?'

'"The Picturesque," my lord. They sent a special artist down, your lordship, and the illustration is sure to be first rate. Your lordship takes in that journal, no doubt?'

'I do. I shall look out for this picture.'

'Your lordship will be pleased with it, I hope. He was a clever man that did it, we may be sure, my lord.'

Finding that the earl now became silent, the innkeeper bowed himself out of the room. Lord Garlford, with one leg thrown carelessly over the other, sat in the easy chair smoking thoughtfully, the sounds of merriment in the street that came through the open windows falling upon unheeding ears.

CHAPTER IX.

A CITY OF ROSES.

THE earl fidgetted in his chair for a few minutes, and then rose and walked to the window. Leaning upon the sill, he looked out upon the crowds in the street below. The pleasure fair had ended yesterday, but the workpeople of Davenstone had not yet mustered the courage to return to their employment, and the thoroughfares still wore their holiday appearance. Loungers were at every corner in larger numbers than ever, and business of all kinds seemed suspended, while the faces of passers-by looked sallow, jaded, and vacant, as though they had not recovered from the dissipations incident to the carnival. The only tradesman's shop that was driving a brisk trade, apparently, was one exactly

opposite the hotel. It was a deep-gabled, heavily-timbered tenement with overhanging stories, antiquated and interesting; and the windows were adorned with photographs and prints of St. John's Hall, and other noted places in the town, and also representations of various personages who had figured in the glorious and never-to-be-forgotten pageant of the previous Monday; conspicuous among them being counterfeit presentments of the Lady Enid and Earl Geraint. Many persons were passing in and out of this emporium, chiefly visitors to the city who wished to carry away with them mementos of the place and of its procession. It was a bright sunny day, but sultry; and partly on account of the heat of the weather, and partly because of the exhaustion induced by the jollities of the past season, there was an air of languor upon all objects, animate and inanimate. Lord Garlford leaned forward as he puffed his cigar, carelessly watching the idlers gathered under the awnings which shaded the shop windows. A shady place in this tropical temperature was a blessing, and the earl's eyes often turned lazily

to the shadowy depths under the fishmonger's awning next door to the printseller's, the blocks of ice lying on the marble slabs producing a cooling effect upon his visual organs. The merriment in the streets was of a drowsy kind; the flags and streamers were motionless in the air; the strains of music were faltering and intermittent as though the performers were half asleep.

But a demon of restlessness possessed the earl. The atmosphere of the room, although the windows were wide open, was close and stifling to him, and he felt a longing to get out of doors into the open air. He put on his hat, lit another cigar, and opened the door. A long corridor on his left hand led to the interior chambers of the inn; he turned to the right and passed down the broad oak staircase into the hall. Melody was not in the bar as he passed by, or the lord would probably have invited him to be his companion in the stroll. He sauntered into the street, turned up a narrow thoroughfare close to the printseller's, and walked on till he came to St. Peter's Church, whose matchless bells were then ringing a glorious peal. Here he

stopped, and leaning his arm upon the churchyard wall, stood idly reading the inscriptions upon the gravestones. Presently he moved farther up, still running his eye over the epitaphs, and keeping close to the wall. He was now standing near to the mansion where dwelt the mayor of Davenstone, but the earl had his back towards it. Mr. Eagles chanced to be walking up the causeway at this moment. Lifting his eyes, Lord Garlford saw in the distance a gentleman, short of stature and lightly built, with a grey beard and an active, energetic manner, coming along at a brisk pace. The lord's languid bearing seemed to be changed instantly. Behind him was a flight of stone steps that led down to an ancient crypt, now used as wine vaults. Quickly and somewhat hurriedly Lord Garlford passed down these steps, and stood in the darkness. If he wished to avoid the gentleman approaching, he succeeded in doing so completely.

'I beg pardon,' said the earl, gasping slightly, and addressing a young man who was evidently a clerk, and who had emerged from a little office at the foot of the steps,—

'I beg pardon, but would you kindly—I am Lord Garlford—would you kindly let me look over this crypt. I have been told it is a remarkable and interesting feature of subterranean Davenstone.'

'Certainly, my lord; with the greatest pleasure,' said a stout gentleman—the wine merchant himself, who also made his appearance. 'John' (to the clerk), 'light the candles and show the way. I am proud to have the honour, your lordship.'

The broad daylight overhead was now a thing of the past; so was the pealing of the matchless bells. Dense gloom was all around, and the ringing of the bells, owing to the thickness of the walls enclosing the earl, was quite inaudible. Glancing dreamily at the interminable rows of bottles and barrels that were stored in the recesses, the lord followed his guides along an immense range of cellarage.

'A damp, dark, unventilated place,' he remarked, taking care to stoop his tall person to avoid the fungi hanging from the roof.

'Yes, my lord. Lift the candle higher, John. This vegetable tissue, your lordship,' said the merchant, pointing to the fungi in the

ceiling, 'is the growth of ages. In some places it is nearly two feet in length, and so thick and close that the roof is entirely hidden.'

The earl said he had never seen such an extraordinary collection of mouldiness and mildew in the whole course of his life.

'The vaulting which it hides is of brick, not stone, my lord,' said the knowing merchant, 'so that strictly speaking this place is not a crypt but a portion of a floor. You are aware, my lord, I suppose, that you are now standing on the site of the ancient Benedictine Priory, which extended a considerable distance beyond the limits of these wine vaults of mine, and indeed beyond the present residence of our worthy mayor, Mr. Eagles.'

'Oh, indeed,' responded the earl, turning his head to examine the fungi above him more closely.

'Yes, my lord. From the position of the Priory, which was erected on the slope of the hill northward towards the Sherbourne, there can be no doubt that a series of these structures must have existed, not only for the elevation of its eastern end, but for preserving the level of the floor of the Priory

church on its northern side for nearly the whole length. There is strong ground in favour of the theory that the church (which extended along the southern side of the conventual buildings, and on higher ground) was considerably raised on the site adjoining them. It is a peculiar site, and such an arrangement would be absolutely necessary. A former mayor of this town, who likewise lived on a part of the site of the cathedral church, and who spent a great deal of time in investigating its buried portions, once pointed out to me a spot about half-way down Hill-top (which crosses the site of the great transept, my lord), where, during the excavations made for sewerage, the workmen came to the top of a narrow pointed doorway, ten feet below the present surface of the roadway at that point, which is much below the level of the road adjoining St. Peter's churchyard. On clearing away the *débris* it was found to lead to a stair turret, the steps descending. Unfortunately, your lordship, it was not traced further, or discoveries of great interest and value might have been made. I have been informed by a late resident in Cathedral Row,

that a passage was found in the lower portion of the gardens, behind the house, some thirty years ago, evidently leading to chambers, the existence of which is not now known. Go forward with the candle, John.'

'In various parts of the city, my lord,' continued the wine merchant, 'there are several underground structures that were connected with the religious houses; but some of the more interesting were of a commercial and domestic character. Your lordship knows that Davenstone was a remarkable town, because it was half civil and half ecclesiastical.'

'Yes, I have heard so.'

'Those mediæval buildings, my lord, that I speak of, were used especially as store houses. They were dark holes, but they were safe places in which to keep deeds and other valuables at a period when houses were constructed mostly of wood. These hidden recesses of stone were fire-proof receptacles, too, for merchandise. There was a great number of trading companies here then. Have you seen the crypt under St. John's Hall, my lord?'

'Yes, I have seen that.'

'Well, there can be little doubt but that cellarage served as warehouses for the merchandise of the guild who built the hall, your lordship; or at least for such members as did not possess places of their own equally secure from fire or plunder. In the larger crypts throughout the town there are recesses in the walls, evidently designed to be used as places of still greater security, either for deeds or plate.'

By this time the wonderful underground arches had all been explored, and they were returning towards the entrance to the vaults. When they reached the foot of the steps, the earl courteously thanked his conductor for his kindness, and for the interesting information he had given, and then, having first hastily glanced up and down the causeway, he emerged once more into the light of day.

(The wine merchant some time afterwards received the present of a hamper of game from Garlford Castle, accompanied by a compli mentary message.)

Leaving the wine vaults the earl turned back by the way he had come. He skirted the low churchyard wall, sauntered along the

narrow crooked lane (shut in by quaint dwellings with every variety of gable end, the upper stories overhanging on either side and nearly meeting at the top) and so re-entered the inn-yard. In the same listless, dawdling manner he reached the stables, where two or three men were still busy with his throughbreds, amid a clatter of pails, one man bidding another 'fatch some more warter for th' 'osses.' They touched their caps as the lord entered, and he chatted with them pleasantly, stepping from stall to stall, now patting a favourite leader on the flank, calling out 'Steady!' to a high-mettled mare, and addressing all the animals by name,—'Darling,' 'Spot,' and so forth, as he moved among the straw.

'They have another two hours' rest before them, poor beasts,' he said, addressing Sam.

'Yes, my lord, and they've earned it, too; such a fine style as they came in, to be sure!' answered the head ostler.

'If horses are well treated,' rejoined the earl, 'they will never do their work badly.

'No, my lord; your lordship is quite right,' said Sam, touching his cap once more.

As the earl turned away his eye lighted upon the great heavy gates at the bottom of the yard, now closed and fastened; and the ostler, still disposed to talk, told him of the orders he had received from Mr. Melody.

'Exactly,' said the lord, his face a shade redder than usual. 'Keep out the bad characters by all means.' And with these words he walked up the yard to the principal entrance to the hotel. At this moment the black-bearded landlord came out, and lifting his hat said, with an insinuating smile (for Melody cultivated the art of pleasing with more assiduity than is usual, even with innkeepers),

'I beg your lordship's pardon for an omission I was guilty of a little time ago. I mean, when your lordship did me the honour to exchange a few words with me in the room up-stairs to-day.'

'What is the matter now, Melody?'

'Well, my lord, although I knew so perfectly how welcome any means of amusement would be during these tedious four hours that your lordship has to wait before the coach can start for Bayborough—'

'Yes.'

'Yet, my lord, I quite forgot to mention what is going on to-day in the Bull-fields on the outskirts of the town.'

'And pray, what is afoot *there*, Melody?'

'The flower-show, my lord,' replied the innkeeper, pushing back his long, well-oiled raven locks, and smiling again in his most engaging manner. 'All the fashionable people in the town and neighbourhood are there, your lordship.'

'Then what a miss I have had, Melody!'

'Yes, my lord, and I am afraid it is now too late' (looking at his watch). 'The *élite* of the county all leave the grounds at one o'clock, and it is now nearly two.'

But the earl did not seem at all disappointed by this last piece of news. On the contrary, he apparently heard it with some satisfaction.

'At what time will the grounds be closed?' he asked.

'At six, my lord; but the riff-raff will be there now; your lordship will not like it, I am afraid.'

'Never mind the riff-raff, Melody; I will

go at once. Thank you for telling me, and the earl started off straightway to find the Bull-fields, declining the offer of any guidance, but enlightened by a few directions which the landlord gave him.

He took his way down Hertford Street, and crossed 'the Green,' where the pleasure fair had so recently been held, and soon reached the scene of the flower-show. A stream of gaily-dressed people were pouring out of the field, the gentlemen with flowers in their button-holes and the ladies carrying rich bouquets. One would have thought Davenstone was a city of roses. The coquettish costumes which adorned the fair sex—all of light, fine, bright materials—added to the general effect of delicacy, beauty, and softness. The earl scanned the occupants of the carriages somewhat nervously, but he met none of his aristocratic acquaintances. He entered the gate with a crowd of tradespeople and shopkeepers, and began to look about him. The music-stand in the centre of the field was empty, the performers having exhausted themselves, probably, in ministering to the delectation of the fashionable patrons

of the show. He sauntered through a great variety of marquees, tents, and pavilions, idly beholding the usual collection of roses, geraniums, fuchsias, ferns, heaths, and so forth, with the accustomed array of pine apples, peaches, grapes, etc., arranged in the most tempting order. But he looked as though he saw not; his air was that of a preoccupied, irresolute man. Just as the military band, after a long interval of rest and refreshment, had condescended to resume their labours, and a lively strain was stealing through the air, he overheard two or three bystanders exchanging the following remarks :—

'Mr. Eagles has not left the ground yet, has he?' asked one.

'No, he came very late; it was nearly one o'clock when he entered the field; but the ladies have been here all the morning,' said another.

'They have waited for him, then?'

'Yes; they will be going home now, I suppose.'

The lord moved away, and continued his rambles. He had reached the end of one of the marquees and was about to step on

to the open sward, when he heard some one say, 'Here's the mayor's carriage!'

The earl stepped back hastily into the shadow of the pavilion, nearly overturning a stand of choice geraniums in the suddenness of his movement, while the carriage containing the lady mayoress, Mr. Eagles, Virginia and her sister, swept past him, and turning a corner, was lost to view.

Emerging from the tent the lord continued his stroll, apparently with a lighter heart.

CHAPTER X.

MR. DANGERFIELD DINES WITH THE MAYOR.

THE incidents described in the last chapter took place on the day after the visit of Mrs. Eagles and the mayor's daughters to the pleasure fair on the Green; and we must now take the reader back a little, and follow those ladies to their home.

On reaching it, the lady mayoress gave her husband a circumstantial account of the fall of the iron bar attached to the steam circus, and of the timely interposition effected by the artist, Mr. Dangerfield, whose graceful deportment and genial manners she dwelt upon with much animation. But Mr. Eagles sternly checked her by inquiring how they came to be near the steam-circus at all? Surely they had not disregarded his express

wishes by going among the shows and mixing with the godless and profane? To this she replied, that they had not done any such thing; that the circus stood close to the bazaar, and that they had not ventured more than two yards beyond its respectable precincts. Even this was a transgression in the eyes of the mayor, who deemed it necessary to administer a reproof accordingly; but nevertheless spoke in terms of commendation of the activity, courage, and presence of mind displayed by Mr. Dangerfield. This encouraged his wife to tell him, with some inward misgiving, that she had invited the artist to dine with them on the following day.

'But, Jane,' said he, with a look of displeasure, 'I told you that, before doing so, I must know more about him from Mr. Shearwater. I have no reason to doubt that this stranger is a most respectable man—a gentleman in every sense of the term—'

'Of course he is, Andrew, any one can see that, in a moment,' interrupted his wife.

'I say, I have no reason to doubt it, Jane. But no stranger shall put his legs under my mahogany unless he comes with the highest

credentials, and bears, to my certain knowledge, a character without a stain.'

'Well, papa,' said Felicia, who saw the tears in her sister's eyes, although Virginia endeavoured to hide them, 'there is plenty of time to call upon Mr. Shearwater before to-morrow evening.'

'And you can ask him any questions you like, Andrew, and make yourself satisfied,' added Mrs. Eagles.

'You might invite the minister to dinner, to meet Mr. Dangerfield, papa,' suggested Felicia. 'As they are friends, it would be nice.'

'So it would, Andrew,' said the lady mayoress.

'Very well,' rejoined Mr. Eagles. 'I have no objection; and of course I must now make a call upon the artist. Where was it he said he was staying?'

'At the Golden Horse, papa,' replied Virginia, who had evidently not forgotten a single word spoken by the stranger on the occasion of the tea-party at Thacker's Yard.

'Then I will leave my card there,' said her father.

The subject then dropped, but the mayor, who showed promptness and energy in everything, proceeded at once to carry out the measures he had decided upon. In a few moments he put on his hat and left the house, directing his steps first to the residence of Mr. Shearwater. He was somewhat mortified, however, when the servant answered the bell, to learn from her that the minister had left home that morning on a journey to London and would not return until late on Saturday night. Mr. Eagles debated in his own mind as he walked away from the door whether it would not be prudent and advisable, in this emergency, to postpone Mr. Dangerfield's invitation; but knowing that his womenkind would all be up in arms against him if he took that course, and remembering that he had no grounds of suspicion whatever against the artist, and was really under some obligation to him since the accident at the pleasure fair, he proceeded (the canonical hours for making polite calls being not yet over) in the direction of the Golden Horse Hotel. This unpretending and insignificant hostelry was situated in a narrow winding thoroughfare at the back

of the main streets, and stood just below the opening that led into Thacker's Yard. The mayor inly wondered that a gentleman of Mr. Dangerfield's position had not chosen an inn of a more fashionable description, and he entered its precincts, and inquired if the artist were within, with some show of reluctance and disdain. Here he encountered a second disappointment (if indeed he really wished for a personal interview) for he was informed that Mr. Dangerfield had gone out, nor could they tell when he would return. Mr. Eagles left his card, however, and so *that* matter was disposed of.

At seven o'clock the next evening the inmates of the mayor's mansion heard the ring at the door which announced the coming of the invited guest. This event had been prepared for with the utmost anxiety by Mrs. Eagles, who hoped to show this grand gentleman from London that in the matter of good cookery and good waiting her management was not to be 'snuffed at.' With the utmost care had she provided the julienne, the red mullet, lamb cutlets with cucumber, the ragout of sweetbreads, the venison, and the quails

while the iced soufflé, strawberry cream, and lemon-sponge, together with the pine-apple, cream, strawberries, cherries, apricots, and melons, had actually caused the good lady a sleepless night. At this very moment the white cloth of the finest damask so very exactly spread on the dining-room table; the dazzling array of cutlery, silver, and glass; the beautiful flowers, ferns and moss; the grapes in their own green leaves, the strawberries and cherries piled high on their respective dishes, the peaches, apricots, and plums ensconced each in a separate leaf, so that they might not be robbed of their delicate bloom; the pine and melons, the sprays of ferns and the ice-plant, the crystallised fruits sparkling in showy boxes—all these, and other enchanting details, testified to the housewifely concern of the lady mayoress on this memorable occasion.

Just now she is in the drawing-room, of course, arrayed in heavy silks, lace, and jewellery, and as rosy and smiling as any hostess need be. The two girls had not yet come down stairs; but Mr. Eagles stood, in full evening dress, on the snowy rug in

front of the fireplace. When the ring came to the front door he was telling his wife that a private dinner was an infallible touchstone wherewith to test a snob, and that if this stranger were not really a gentleman he should find him out before the night was over, and besides that, it would go hard if they did not discover, by dint of judicious leading questions, all about his mode of life, acquaintances, and antecedents; and if he came well out of the ordeal he should respect him. and extend to him his distinguished friendship.

When Mr. Dangerfield was ushered into the drawing-room by the servant, his appearance produced a favourable impression at once. His manly form was set off to advantage by the full evening dress; his voice was agreeable; his movements easy and graceful. The first salutations over, the mayor told him with a smile that this was a little dinner *en famille;* that they had intended to ask the Rev. Mr. Shearwater to meet him, but that worthy and excellent man was, he found, in London for a few days. The artist was in the act of making a suitable

reply, when Virginia and Felicia came into the room, and surely lovelier visions never greeted the eyes of mortal man! A moment afterwards the butler announced dinner.

Mr. Eagles gave his arm to his eldest daughter, Felicia followed alone, while the lady mayoress brought up the rear, conducted by Mr. Dangerfield. 'Now,' thought the mayor, as they all took their seats at the dinner table, 'this man is about to be put to the test.'

But the artist was self-possessed, and despatched his soup in a manner that gave unbounded satisfaction. Nor did he seem to expect to be served twice either with the soup or the fish, so that he was not to be placed in the same category with the man of whom Beau Brummel said contemptuously, 'He is a fellow, now, that would send up his plate twice for soup.' The guest's demeanour was most exemplary throughout the entire feast, the different courses failing to put him out of countenance at all. Even when, at the conclusion of dinner, the table was cleared of everything but the dessert dishes and flower decorations, and, the crumbs

having been taken off, the slips were with drawn, and a dessert plate, on which was a d'oyley, a finger glass, and silver knife and fork, was placed before him—even then the artist did not lose his presence of mind. He appeared to have seen such articles before, and used them deftly and composedly. In short, he was rising in the mayor's estimation every moment.

The wines were good, the dishes had been excellent, and the waiting on the part of butler and footman faultless. The company having brains and tongues, too, and being on the best of terms with each other, the conversation had not flagged.

'We are looking very anxiously for this forthcoming number of "The Picturesque," Mr. Dangerfield,' said the mayor, wiping his mouth with his napkin, and starting a new topic.

'Indeed we are!' chimed in Mrs. Eagles, beaming upon the artist; 'I do so long to see your drawings of our procession!'

'The journal comes out to-morrow, so we have not long to wait,' remarked Felicia.

'I fear your patience will be taxed longer

than that,' said Mr. Dangerfield with a smile; 'and really the sketch was a very slight one, I assure you, Mr. Eagles. I wish I had taken more pains with it.'

'You think, then, that there has not been time enough for them to bring out the illustration this week?' asked the mayor.

'Scarcely; but it is just possible they *may* have done so.'

The hostess here rose from her chair, looking as she did so at Virginia, who had been nearly silent throughout the dinner, but very happy,—and the three ladies left the room, the door being opened for them by their polite and well-bred guest. The gentlemen resumed their seats, and commenced a confidential chat over their wine.

'It is very pleasant to me,' said the mayor, 'to have a friend to dinner in this quiet way. My public duties, as you may suppose, are numerous, and I have been able to spend but few evenings at home, or to enjoy myself in the domestic circle. On Monday, again, I have to go up to London on important business connected with the town and corporation. We are fighting a hard battle against the butchers

here, who will not use the shambles we have provided, and plead an ancient charter of privileges. We must have a special Act of Parliament to put them down. That is one piece of business which will take me up to the House of Commons to see the members for the city, and to confer with others also.'

'I hope you will meet with success.'

'Thanks. Another matter to which I have to give my attention is this. There is a clever young man in this town named Sebastian Botoner, an inventor. He is bringing out an improved steam tramway car, which I greatly admire. But before he can meet with success in public, certain restrictions must be removed or abated by the Parliament, and he must have some encouragement. I hope to get our members to promote a bill which will answer these ends. So you see, Mr. Dangerfield, I have much to do which necessarily draws me a good deal from home.'

'Indeed, you have. I am returning home to London for a few days myself,' said the artist; 'and if you could spare the time, it would give me much pleasure to receive a

call from you at my rooms in Codrington Square, Chelsea.'

'I shall be most happy, Mr. Dangerfield, I am sure,' returned the mayor.

'Since I hope for a continuance of your goodwill towards me,' continued the artist, 'and you have extended hospitality to me, although I am a stranger, I wish to mention that there are very few persons in London who know me well. I will give you the names of three friends of mine there. First, Mr. Harold Thwaites, the editor of "The Picturesque."'

'Yes?'

'Next, the Honourable Robert Chutney, who has been a liberal patron of mine for some years, and has bought nearly all the pictures I ever painted.'

'Does he live in Chelsea?'

'No; his address is Queen's Gate, Westminster. Thirdly, the Rev. Dr. Tuckett, the Vicar of St. Mary's, Chelsea.'

'You are a Churchman, then, Mr. Dangerfield?'

'Well, no; but the Dissenting minster is not personally acquainted with me, while Dr. Tuckett is.'

'I hope,' said the mayor, as they rose to join the ladies in the drawing-room, 'that this is not the last time by a good many that you will dine with us in this house.'

In the drawing-room a happy time was spent; and it was so evident to Mr. Eagles, from what he saw and heard during the evening, that Mr. Dangerfield and Virginia were in love with each other, that he made a mental note of the names and addresses his guest had given him, and resolved to prosecute inquiries in those quarters without delay.

The next morning there appeared the long-expected number of 'The Picturesque,' and when it was opened with trembling eagerness by the ladies of the mayor's family, they beheld the picture they had so impatiently looked for. It was a representation—very spirited and clever—of the marshalling of the pageant outside St. John's Hall. They showed it to Mr. Eagles, who remarked that 'Dangerfield was evidently a man of great talent.'

The next day was Sunday. It was not the mayor's habit to converse on any but religious or ecclesiastical subjects on that day,

but when he met Mr. Shearwater in Thacker's Yard, he was impelled, by a sense of the importance of gaining information, and by the fact that he would have to leave Davenstone on the morrow for London, to ask him what he knew relative to Mr. Dangerfield.

'My dear sir—nothing!' replied the minister, dangling his gold eyeglass between his thumb and forefinger.

'But you introduced him to my family, and to myself, as a friend of yours.'

'Did I? Well, he had been so agreeable, that we had become quite intimate in two hours, and it seemed as if I had known him for years. On the morning of the tea-party he called at my house and introduced himself as an artist from London, sent down to make sketches for some journal. He belonged to our persuasion, he said; and having seen a printed notice in the streets of our meeting, he wished to attend it, if I would allow him to accompany me.'

'Then you had not seen him until that day?'

'Never.'

'Did he bring no credentials?'

'I saw none.'

'The man has been dining at my house,' said Mr. Eagles in an aggrieved tone; and then he went on to tell the minister the names of the references Mr. Dangerfield had given him.

'Then he is all right, depend upon it,' said Mr. Shearwater, heartily. 'If the man had been an impostor, he would not have been able to mention such names as those.'

CHAPTER XI.

LETTERS FROM LONDON.

IT is time we gave the reader some further account of the fortunes of Sebastian Botoner, whom we last saw in a state of convalescence. This vigorous and courageous young fellow soon recovered from the injuries inflicted upon him by his cowardly assailants. There is some satisfaction also in stating that Pitcherley, Hemmings, and Saul Wabsale were sentenced at the assizes to various terms of penal servitude for that unprovoked assault. The treacherous blacksmith had fifteen years allotted to him, young Wabsale ten, and Pitcherley five.

The inventor was now busy once more with his improved steam tramway car. He was no longer straitened for want of funds

in carrying out the ideas he had formed in his own mind, money being freely supplied to him for this purpose by Mr. Eagles, Alderman Jeffard, Valentine Laxey, and others. These new patrons were less exacting than the old ones had been, and never interfered with his plans, leaving him entirely unfettered. Under their genial auspices the enterprise was progressing satisfactorily. Yet the toil of brain and body was very exhausting, and sometimes Sebastian felt weary and sick at heart. At such seasons of depression, a visit to the old monument in St. Peter's Church always revived and encouraged him. Looking at the four defaced and time-worn effigies of his ancestors, whose spirit and splendid generosity had reared the fabric in which that monument stood, he would nerve himself once more for labour and self-denial.

His love for Felicia, too, was a source of hope and strength to him. If he might but one day call her his own, he would be a thousand-fold repaid for his struggles. And had she not given him more encouragement than he dared to expect? Had not her father also, though he knew how high he

had fixed his aims, still continued his friend and helper, and tacitly allowed his daughter perfect freedom of action? These considerations were a potent stimulus to redoubled exertions. Every morning, therefore, he rose with the dawn, and continued his work upon the new model in the little shed at the back of his lodging.

Botoner still believed that to secure the requisite absence of noise, smoke, and steam, his tramway locomotive should be constructed upon a similar principle to that he had adopted before, despite strong opposition on the part of his old patrons, namely, the pressure of five hundred pounds on the square inch; and that it should have compound engines, the high pressure cylinder being single-acting.

'That is the plan I shall follow once more,' the craftsman said to himself in his enthusiasm. 'The idea came to me, I believe, from Heaven. They have laughed at it and spurned it; but it sticks to me, like snow to one's boot-heel!'

One day he was reading this story:—'In the garden of Paradise a rose tree grew be-

neath the tree of knowledge. Among the roses a bird was born; its flight was like a sunbeam, its colours glorious, its song the sweetest music.

'But when Eve gathered the forbidden fruit, and she and Adam were driven out of Paradise, a spark fell from the angel's flaming sword and set the nest on fire. The bird perished in the flames, but out of the glowing egg the new-born Phœnix soared aloft, the sole bird of its kind in all the world. The saga says that its nest is built in Arabia, and that every hundred years it destroys itself by fire, and from its ashes falls the burning egg out of which the new Phœnix springs to life.

'The bird hovers around us all, bright in colour, glorious in song. When the mother sits by her child's cradle it rests upon the infant's pillow, and its gleaming wings form a glory over the little head.

'It flies through the lowly room of poverty, and fills it with sunlight and the scent of violets.

But the bird is not the Phœnix of Arabia only; it flutters in the gleam of the northern lights, across the ice-fields of Lapland, and

among the pale flowers of the brief Greenland summer. Through the copper mines of Falun, through the English coal-pits it flies, like a dusky moth, above the hymn-book in the pious workman's hands. It glides down the Ganges on the lotus blossom, and the eyes of the Hindoo maiden brighten at its coming.

'Phœnix! bird of Paradise! sacred swan of song! do you not know it? It sat upon the car of Thespis like a chattering raven, and flapped its black wings. Over Iceland's echoing harp it rose like a red-beaked swan. On Shakespeare's shoulder it lighted, like Odin's raven, and whispered "Immortality!" It flew through Wartburg's knightly halls at the minstrel's feast.

'It sang the "*Marseillaise*," and you kissed the feather that fell from its wings; it came to you in the glory of Paradise, and you turned perchance away, to look at the sparrow strutting there with tinselled wings.

'The bird of Paradise! Born anew every century; born in flames to die in flames again. Its image hangs in the halls of wealth and wanders lonely in desolate by-

ways: only a saga, "Bird Phœnix in Arabia!"'

'This rhapsody,' said the young mechanic with a smile, 'this rhapsody of Hans Christian Andersen's has a private interpretation. Poesy was *his* Phœnix; the high-pressure principle shall be *mine*.'

Withdrawing himself, therefore, from his musical studies, his mathematics, and foreign languages, Sebastian devoted all his spare hours to the new model; and so diligently did he apply himself, that in a very short time it was completed; and, having been tested in the presence of Mr. Eagles, the alderman, and Councillor Laxey, was pronounced by them a complete success.

When the inventor had gained the patronage of Mr. Eagles, the latter had not only advanced him money from time to time, but had also spoken very well of his model to several persons in high places—among the rest to the members for the city, who had promised to use their influence to get an Act of Parliament passed enabling our hero to bring out his invention under favourable conditions.

Negotiations had proceeded with so much success, that a steam tramway company was already formed and a prospectus issued, stating a capital of £25,000, in shares of £5 each. 'Tramway securities are so well and favourably known,' said the prospectus, 'that they scarcely require comment from us; but this company has a decided advantage over most, if not all of them, BY THE POWER TO USE STEAM, thereby avoiding the cost and keep of horses; and the trams being constructed to carry goods as well as passengers, an additional source of profit is thus also obtained over the majority of other companies.

'The directors expect to open the line for traffic in a very few months.

'The allotment of shares will take place strictly in accordance with priority, and it is advisable that applications should be forwarded as early as possible.'

'Mr. Eagles was now in London, having gone up to confer with certain members of Parliament with regard to this company, and also respecting the bill, which was under the consideration of the House. He had

promised, before his departure from home, to write to our hero, reporting the progress made; and a letter from him was hourly expected. There was very little doubt but the bill would pass, granting all the needed powers to the directors, so that the inventor awaited the promised communication without anxiety.

One morning the postman brought him a letter which he at once saw to be in the mayor's handwriting. On opening it, however, he was surprised to find that though it was indeed sent by the sagacious Yorkshireman, its subject-matter was strange, incomprehensible, and totally different to what he had looked for. Instead of dealing with the prospects of the steam tramway company, there was not one word said about it from the beginning to the end; but the letter had reference to a certain Mr. Dangerfield whom the mayor had been visiting at his rooms in Codrington Square, Chelsea, and about sundry inquiries the former had been making in different parts of London touching the character and position of the said Mr. Dangerfield. Mention was made

of a clergyman at Chelsea, of a man of fashion in Westminster, and of the editor of a journal published in Fleet Street, with all of whom Mr. Eagles had been conversing about this mysterious person. Botoner looked the letter over in a state of extreme perplexity and amazement. Some mistake had been made, evidently. Yes! It was addressed, 'My dear Wife.' He now perceived that it had been enclosed in the wrong envelope; and in all probability the communication intended for him had been sent to Mrs. Eagles.

'This is something important, probably,' thought our hero, as he put the letter back into the envelope. 'The mayoress may be anxiously expecting it, so I will take it to her at once.'

His heart beat quickly as he rang the bell at Mr. Eagles' mansion. The young craftsman was already a man of some consequence in the town, the steam tramway having risen into notice; so when he told the servant he wished to see his mistress or one of the young ladies, he was at once shown into the drawing-room. Here he

waited, wondering if he would see Felicia. Presently he heard a step descending the stairs in the hall. He knew instantly *whose* it was and his heart gave a great throb. For one moment he felt sick and faint, but he started to his feet as the bright vision of his best beloved entered the room. She was attired in a light plain morning dress, having a little collar fastened round her white throat. 'How beautiful she is!' thought Sebastian.

'Mamma is unwell this morning, and has not yet come down stairs,' she said, as she gave him her hand with a sweet smile. She looked so bewitching and irresistible, that he straightway put his arm round her waist and kissed her. What a blissful, rapturous moment it was!

'Can you guess what I have brought, darling?' said he.

'I think I can.'

'Why, what a little witch you are! Tell me then.'

'A letter from papa.'

Yes! his surmise was correct; there had evidently been a mistake on the part of the

mayor; the young inventor saw that she was hiding something in her left hand.

'It is your turn to guess now,' said Felicia archly.

'Have you anything for me?'

'Yes.'

'A letter from your father?'

What a merry silvery laugh as he took her fingers in his broad grasp! By-and-by the exchange had been made, and Felicia said, referring to the communication Mr. Eagles had intended for her lover,

'We know its contents; we had read it through before we discovered the mistake papa had made.'

'Is it favourable, darling?'

'Read it. I congratulate you.'

Our hero ran his eye over the following:—

'MY DEAR MR. BOTONER,—I have just had an interview with both the members for the city, and with several other influential persons in the House, who tell me they are persuaded of the great public utility of your undertaking, and will do their utmost to promote its success The bill, upon which so much depend

will undoubtedly pass this week. Your future is now assured. I hope to return home in two or three days, and we will then confer together respecting our proceedings. With kind regards,—Yours very truly,

'ANDREW EAGLES.

'Mr Sebastian Botoner.'

The inventor's breast expanded with honest pride, and his broad, clear brow lighted up with thankfulness.

'Under God, Felicia,' said he, 'I owe this to you. You encouraged me when I was friendless and unknown. You did not spurn me when I spoke of love, although I myself was amazed at my boldness; some would have called it presumption. You bade me hope and struggle on, and I did so, stimulated by the desire of one day claiming you as my wife. Thank God for your true love, Felicia!'

'I knew,' said she, with maidenly modesty, 'that you would be worthy of your noble ancestors.'

After a time they spoke of the other letter —that relating to Mr. Dangerfield—which the reader will find in the next chapter.

'May I ask you, dear,' said she, 'to keep this matter secret? Do not tell any one.'

'Your slightest wish is sacred.'

'There is an attachment'—she was saying with a rosy blush, when, seeing an inquiring look in his eyes, she added hastily, 'It is my sister.'

Then she related to him the facts with which the reader is already acquainted.

'So far as we can tell,' she said, 'no one but you knows anything about this attachment. For the present papa wishes that it should not be talked about. Now I must take the letter upstairs, for they are dying to read it.'

'Goodbye, sweetheart.'

'Goodbye!' then she released herself and left him, and Sebastian took his way to his lodgings, the happiest man in Davenstone.

CHAPTER XII.

'COME AND SEE LORD GARLFORD.'

FELICIA took the letter up stairs to Mrs. Eagles and her sister, who were awaiting her coming with intense eagerness. Virginia knew how much depended upon its contents. If her father's inquiries respecting Mr. Dangerfield had satisfied him of her lover's suitability, then her happiness, she thought, was assured; but if otherwise, and she were bidden to think of him no more, her future would be a barren, joyless waste.

The letter was opened, and read aloud by the mayoress, as follows:—

'9 ELDON TERRACE, BAYSWATER.

'MY DEAR WIFE,—I have been so busy since I came to London, that this is the first

opportunity which has presented itself of writing to you at any length, but I suppose you received the telegram apprising you of my safe arrival here, which I sent three days ago. I am glad to tell you that I found Barbara in much better health than usual.' This was the mayor's only sister, a maiden lady, living at Bayswater. 'She is in excellent spirits, and expressed a strong desire that the two girls should come and visit her, and make a long stay—three months at least. I think perhaps the change would do them good. Tell them to consider the matter. Mind! I have made no promises; but at the same time I feel sure she would be mightily pleased to see them.'

Mrs. Eagles here turned to ask them if they would care to go. Felicia replied she was quite indifferent about it. On the whole she thought she would rather not. Virginia's answer was made in so low a tone that its purport was doubtful, but the mayoress was entreated to continue her reading.

'You were anxious' (thus ran the letter) 'that I should call upon Mr. Harold Thwaites, and ascertain if Dangerfield's representations

were truthful and his character good. I myself felt a great desire to do so, and accordingly I went yesterday to the office in Fleet Street, and saw the editor for a few minutes. The result of the interview was entirely satisfactory. Mr. Thwaites did indeed send our friend down to Davenstone to make the sketches (as he told us), and the editor likewise spoke in high terms of his general conduct, his application and ability. From thence I proceeded to Queen's Gate, Westminster, with the same object in view. There I saw the Honourable Robert Chutney, who was dawdling over the breakfast-table in a gorgeous dressing-gown, although it was past mid-day. He told me he knew the artist well; that he had given him several commissions, and had met him in society frequently; and that he was regarded as a gentleman. In the next place I went to the house of the Rev. Dr. Tuckett, in Chelsea. This clergyman was extremely aged and infirm, but nevertheless, judging from what he told me, he is an indefatigable visitor among his people, and well acquainted with them all. When I mentioned the name and address of our friend, and

related the circumstances which led to our acquaintance, Mr. Tuckett at once put me in possession of several interesting facts relating to him, and remarked that he saw him in church very frequently. Well, I finished the day's work with a visit to Mr. Dangerfield himself, at his rooms in Codrington Square. He was extremely pleased to see me, and insisted that I should remain to dinner. He was engaged upon an historical picture at the time I called, but immediately put aside his palette and brushes, and devoted himself to my entertainment. His apartments are very elegantly furnished, and he evidently makes a good income by his profession.'

This last item of news was very pleasing to Mrs. Eagles. She cleared her voice, and proceeded with her reading in a livelier strain. Felicia was looking over her shoulder, while Virginia—her glorious eyes fixed upon the mayoress—was leaning forward upon an ottoman.

'I must now tell you' (the letter proceeded) 'what Mr. Dangerfield said to me over the walnuts and wine, after dinner.'

'Listen!' said Mrs. Eagles. 'This is important to one of you at least.'

'He said he had no doubt I had observed that marked attentions had been paid by him to my eldest daughter. In point of fact he was deeply in love with her, and ardently desired to make her his wife. He trusted I would look upon his suit with favour. His means were sufficient for her support, and his one aim would be to make her happy. I told him that if he gained Virginia's affection, I would offer no obstacle to their union. Dangerfield then entered into particulars respecting his circumstances and prospects, with which I was satisfied. He will be coming to our house in the course of a week, when there is every probability, I think, that he will make a formal declaration to Virginia. Before then, however, I expect to be at home myself, and we can talk the matter over.

'Barbara presses me to stay over Sunday, that she may take me to hear her favourite preacher at St. Andrew's; but I told her I felt like a fish out of water in a church, and much preferred our plain spiritual service at Thacker's Yard.

'I hope to reach home on Saturday evening in time for dinner.

'With love to the girls, believe me, your affectionate husband, ANDREW EAGLES.'

Virginia had stolen to the window, where she stood looking out, motionless aud silent. Her sister stepped up behind her, and putting her plump arm round her neck, gave her a hearty kiss.

'He is nice,' she said, 'and you will be very happy.'

'Yes.'

A large tear was rolling down Virginia's cheek, but there was a glad light in her eyes and a smile upon her sweet lips.

'Those artist fellows,' Felicia went on, with a merry little laugh, 'those artist fellows are not usually of our set. They do not often speak the language of Canaan. They are wild, rollicking Bohemians, with a spice of wickedness in them. But Charles Dangerfield is different. You may give yourself to him, dear, and feel that he will have sympathy with the views papa has always held.'

'He has queer friends though, hasn't he?' said the lady mayoress. 'That Honourable—what's-his-name?—for instance.'

'The gentleman in the gorgeous dressing-gown you mean?' returned Felicia. 'But then he is Mr. Dangerfield's patron rather than his friend—buys his pictures, you know. He is not the kind of man Charles would be intimate with, of course.'

'Oh! no,' said the lovely Virginia.

'Well,' said Mrs. Eagles, 'I always said he was a perfect gentleman, and stood up for him against Felicia and your father. You see now that I took the right side from the first.'

Felicia laughed gaily at this sally, and made some reply which Virginia did not hear, for she was dreamily contemplating the new position of affairs, and presently she withdrew from the room to reflect in solitude.

The mayor came home at the end of the week, and the family discussed the subject of Mr. Dangerfield's approaching visit, and the offer of marriage he was about to make, with much unanimity of sentiment. It was agreed that he was an eligible party, though not exactly the kind of man Mr. Eagles had expected for a son-in-law. Virginia bore but a very slight share in this domestic conver-

sation. She was quiet, contemplative, and happy. But they did not doubt that she loved the artist, and would accept his hand when he should come to offer it.

Two days afterwards the lover came, and was received with open arms. Mr. Eagles was gracious and communicative, the mayoress beaming and matronly, Felicia gay, and Virginia shy and nervous. Mr. Dangerfield also was nervous, but looked manly, noble, and good in the eyes of them all. The artist was allowed the opportunity to declare himself, and he did so. He made Virginia a formal offer of marriage, which she accepted.

When the mayor knew that the thing was settled, he gave the young couple his blessing, and became more gracious and communicative than before. If Virginia had been happy two days ago, she was now in the seventh heaven of bliss. Her beauty became more striking every day. Thacker's Yard marvelled at it; and when she appeared with her lover by her side in Mr. Shearwater's congregation, the sensation was so great that no one was found able to remember the text, much less the sermon. Everybody there

knew that the distinguished-looking stranger in the claret-coloured velvet suit was to be her husband. Such was the artist's devotion to her, that it has been stated he was one afternoon taken captive by her to the Sunday-school, and made to teach an infant class; and further, that those babes took such an unfair advantage of his inexperience and awkwardness, and so railed at him, defied him, and set him at nought, that he was fain to retreat in confusion and fly from the yard, vowing that not even for her sake would he again venture to face that terrible ordeal.

Virginia smiled at him for this, and loved him all the more. He in his turn was placed in completer thraldom daily by her loveliness and piety. It was a case of true love on both sides. How she loved to hear him talk! It is true his topics were limited as to number, but upon these he could speak fluently and well. His voice was resonant, his intonation exact and agreeable to the ear. He discoursed upon art and artists, upon London society, and upon horses—farther than this he never strayed. He was once enlarging upon the last-named subject in the presence of the

mayor, Mrs. Eagles, and the two girls, when Felicia remarked that she had been told the best horses in Davenstone were to be seen in the stables of the Lady Enid Hotel.

'You mean Lord Garlford's, I suppose?' said the artist, turning towards her.

'Yes.'

'Have you seen them?' asked Virginia.

'Once or twice he has been driving along the street, either going or returning, when I have been in the town; but the spectacle had but little attractions for me, and I barely looked. Does he drive well?'

'Splendidly, people say,' returned Felicia.

'His lordship is so cool and self-possessed, Mr. Dangerfield,' said the lady mayoress, beaming as usual.

'A steady hand and a clear head are needed to drive a four-in-hand, Jane,' said her husband testily. 'Do you think he would be so ridiculous as to exhibit himself in public every day on that box if he had not the requisite coolness? Do talk common sense, and don't be childish.'

'What sort of man is Lord Garlford, may I ask?' said the artist, turning to the mayor. 'What does the town say about him?'

'Well, persons of my way of thinking call him vain, egotistical, and obstinate, and his undertaking a piece of ridiculous nonsense, if not worse,' replied Mr. Eagles.

'Oh! indeed!'

'There are those, however,' continued the stout Yorkshireman, 'who take a different view. Foolish, hare-brained people admire him, and praise his condescension. Condescension, forsooth!'

'Have you seen the coach?' asked Mr. Dangerfield, looking at Virginia.

'Not once,' she replied with a sweet smile.

'Have you, Felicia?'

'No, but I should like to. Let us make up an expedition for to-morrow. Come and see Lord Garlford and his beautiful thoroughbreds.'

The mayor pooh-poohed the suggestion, but his wife and Virginia received it with favour, and accordingly, the next day, the artist called at Mr. Eagles' house a little before four o'clock, and escorted the two girls to a favourable point of observation at the end of Broadgate. They were fortunate enough to see the coach start, but it chanced that the earl was not

upon the box that day, Bob Skittler handling the ribbons in his stead.

'I am quite disappointed,' said Felicia when the coach had rattled by. 'I do so want to see Lord Garlford.'

'So do I,' added Virginia.

'Then pray let me have the pleasure of bringing you another day,' said Mr. Dangerfield, with a bow. 'We may have better success next time.'

'Thanks.'

'Who is that middle-aged, Italian-looking man standing at the top of the inn-yard?' asked Mr. Dangerfield, as they turned away.

'Oh, that is Mr. Melody, the landlord.'

'Is it, indeed! What long, waving, black hair he has! Well, we will try again tomorrow.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LADY ENID'S PORTRAIT.

THEY tried again the next day, but the wish expressed by the two girls was not realised. Bob Skittler was once more on the bench of the drag instead of the earl; so, with a sigh of disappointment, Virginia and her sister turned back.

With the view of idling away the half-hour or so before tea, they accompanied the artist into the neighbouring church of the Holy Trinity, the door of which was open. This edifice stood opposite the mayor's house, and close to St. Peter's (already described in these pages), nearly equalling it in point of antiquity and magnificence. Entering the building, our young people were proceeding to look about them, when a pale verger came up and put them in possession of the following facts:—

'There is no certain clue,' said he, 'for ascertaining the exact period at which this church was erected or founded, its origin, like that of St. Peter's, being now involved in obscurity. Enough, however, has been left on record to show its exceeding age; that it was at first an appendage to the great monastic establishment over the way' (here the verger pointed in the direction where Mr. Eagles' mansion stood), 'and that many circumstances and details connected with its history are deeply interesting. The earliest known mention of it is of the time of Henry III., but it is of much older date than that.'

'Evidently,' said Mr. Dangerfield.

'Now although this edifice was founded not much earlier than St. Peter's,' continued the verger, 'there is a marked difference in the structural character of the two, both externally and internally. In its vast dimensions, great length, and graceful outline, and especially in its fine tall spire, the great church near at hand has the advantage; but this building is best adapted for its uses as a parish church.

'The ground-plan approaches to the form of a cross. You observe that it has a good

chancel and nave, transept, centre aisle, with north and south aisles. The tower and spire rise from the centre, supported by four massive but beautifully proportioned pillars and arches.'

The pale verger then showed them the different chantries, which the artist was pleased to admire greatly.

They now entered the vestry.

'You perceive that this is a commodious room with a fine oak roof, having rich carved bosses at the intersection of the beams; and *there* is an ancient painting of the royal arms over the fire-place. On the wall is placed a painted board recording the "gift sermons," of which there are twenty annually, appointed to be preached on various occasions, with the amount of the bequests and the names of the donors.'

'Papa was near getting into trouble about these charities,' Felicia whispered in Mr. Dangerfield's ear. 'There is an odious man named Wabsale, who threatened to take proceedings against the trustees, you know, because he thought they had not discharged their duties properly.'

'But he gave up his intention long since,' Virginia added.

'Oh, yes. He saw afterwards that there was really no ground of complaint,' explained Felicia.

'I am glad of that,' said the artist.

As our party were walking down the north side of the chancel, the verger said,—

'On this spot, between the door of the vestry and the east wall, some very interesting remains of ancient paintings in fresco were brought to light. There had been executed a large cross raised upon steps, on which the figure of Christ was suspended, and above were angels in different attitudes; beside the crucifix a tonsured priest, in an appropiate habit, kneeling.

'But there,' he continued, leading them under the tower, and bidding them look upwards, '*there* a more important discovery was made some years ago. In that space above the springing of the arch, and extending to the roof of the church, indications of colour being perceived, the whole of the surface was with great care and patience divested of numerous coats of whitewash, and found to be entirely

covered with a representation of the Last Judgment, being a most curious, valuable, and lively illustration of ancient dress and the form of expressing ideas. In the centre and at the top of the painting, our Saviour is depicted in the attitude of benediction, clothed in a crimson robe, seated on a rainbow which rests upon the clouds, and the earth as His footstool. A little below are the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist; the twelve apostles being arranged six on each side. Two angels with long trumpets are sounding the summons to judgment, and the tombs are represented as giving up their dead. On the extreme right of our Lord a flight of steps leads to a portico, over which three angels are looking down on the awful scene, and others are welcoming a figure with a tiara, who has just passed St. Peter, and appears to be the first who has approached the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. On the left of the righteous Judge are many doomed spirits, who in various ways and ludicrous attitudes are being conveyed by devils to the torment, represented in the usual manner by the gaping mouth of a monster vomiting flames of fire, and within whose

horrid jaws are several condemned souls writhing in the midst of the devouring element.'

'An extraordinary painting, without a doubt,' said the artist.

'A strange incident occurred here,' proceeded the verger, 'at the time the old bells were removed from the tower, the lantern opened, and a stone groined roof re-built.'

'What incident was that?' asked the two ladies in a breath.

'While the workmen were engaged in removing rubbish and dust from the lower floor of the tower, a large quantity of brimstone matches were found piled up together, some in bundles and others loose; and over these matches were placed several small pieces of wood, for the evident purpose of ignition. It should be understood that this floor was unused, and had been so for many years, and was concealed beneath another floor a few feet higher, upon which the bell-ringers had been accustomed to stand, so that these combustible materials were placed between the two floors. When this plot was contrived, or how the diabolical intention was prevented from being carried into effect, will probably ever

remain a mystery. Judging from the kind of matches and the condition in which they were found, they might have been there for more than a century. It is certain that if a single match had been lighted it would have been scarcely possible to have saved the whole building from destruction by fire.'

'What a dreadful thing to contemplate!' exclaimed the two girls.

They then looked at the ancient brass eagle, the back of which is still used as a lectern; and the pale verger mentioned some curious entries respecting it that were to be found in the old records; as, for instance, in the year 1560,—'Paid for scouring the eagles and candlesticks, tenpence.' 'Item, for mending of the eagle's tail, fifteen pence,' and so on.

'Among the writings in the vestry,' the verger went on, 'there are some suggestive accounts of popish vestments and banners sold in the year 1547, in consequence of the Reformation. For example—"Sold, seven copes of red tissue, a cope of red velvet, three copes of white damask, a cope of green velvet,

two blue copes, a white cope, two old copes, two banner-cloths and one streamer." '

'Yes, those records would be worth a careful perusal,' said Mr. Dangerfield. 'A great variety of other articles were, no doubt, disposed of at the same time.'

'But would be found useful in some Protestant churches now,' said Felicia, slyly.

The verger moved off to a window on the south side of the church.

'In times long since gone by,' he said, 'our windows were rich in stained glass and coats-of-arms. Every vestige of these, however, had been scattered more than a century ago. Besides the coats-of-arms, there were portraits of Geraint and the Countess Enid, with the memorable words inscribed on a scroll beneath,—

> "I, Gerainté, for love of thee,
> Doe make Davenstone Tol-free."

These portraits were in one of the windows on the south side of the church, and some fragments of them remained as late as the year 1830. The countess was represented with long flowing, bright golden hair, and a coronet on her head, her hands being joined and extended in

the attitude of supplication; but below the waist the figure was imperfect. Only the head of the earl was left, which was opposite that of Enid. His hair was short, parted upon the forehead; the beard rather bushy, and the countenance seeming like that of a person somewhat above the middle age. Above these portraits was an imperfect figure upon a small scale of a female in a yellow dress, seated on a white horse, and having a coronet on her head and a branch in her left hand, being intended to portray Enid in the performance of her memorable act of devotedness to the city. These several figures were in the window over the south door, but upon the re-glazing of the windows about the year 1775, they were removed, and an order of the vestry was made "that the painted glass that was formerly over the south door be put up in some window of the church where the committee shall agree upon." In pursuance of this order all that remained of this glass was put in one compartment of another window near the south door. This door, however, which was undoubtedly an innovation, was removed in carrying into effect the alterations commenced

in 1855, and a window placed in its stead; and the last collection of fragments of the old stained glass will now be found' (here the verger moved across the church) 'compressed into the centre panel of *that* window. They are nothing more, you see, than a lot of mere scraps carefully put together, and the brilliant ancient dyes still look showy. The largest and most interesting piece is the small figure of Enid in a yellow dress, with a coronet on her head, and seated on a white horse.'

'She was a noble woman, and well deserved immortality,' said Virginia.

'You would have done the same had you been in her place, I am sure,' whispered the artist; 'though, if I were an earl like Geraint, and you my countess, I would not make such hard terms with you as he did.'

Virginia blushed, and turned away with a smile. Mr. Dangerfield gave the verger half-a-sovereign, and followed the two girls.

'Dearest,' said he, 'where would you like to be married? Would not this fine church be the very place for you?'

Virginia shook her head gently.

'Where then, darling?'

'You know papa's views,' she replied, putting her small hand in his.

'Yes.'

'Of course he would say I must be married at Thacker's Yard. We all attend there, you know; and have done so ever since we came to Davenstone from the north. Felicia and I were quite small children then.'

'But, dearest, what would *you* prefer?'

'To be married in a church like this,' she replied, timidly.

The answer was manifestly satisfactory to the artist, who pressed her hand, saying, 'We will try to arrange it with your father.'

They then left the church.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AUCTION.

A LITTLE below the chief entrance to the 'Lady Enid' was the proprietor's office, garnished with a few sporting prints, a bundle of whips in one corner, a gun over the fire-place, a high stool and a desk covered with papers. Here sat Mr. Melody one afternoon, making for the twentieth time a careful calculation of the value of the house next door, lately the property of the deceased Mr. Pepper. The sale was to take place at six o'clock that same evening, and the innkeeper was expecting Valentine Laxey to tea, since the councillor was to accompany him to the auction-room, and make the biddings for the said property.

Since the coach came in that day at twelve o'clock, Lord Garlford had remained at the inn,

a most unusual course with him. In fact, the earl was at this moment up stairs in his private room. Melody looked at his watch; it was exactly twenty minutes to four. He got off the high stool, and was about to walk down to the stables to superintend the harnessing of the team of chesnuts ready for the start at four o'clock, when a tap was heard at the office-door.

'Come in!' the innkeeper shouted. Enter Wabsale, the butcher, who took off his silk hat and made a low bow.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Melody.'

The innkeeper surveyed him from head to foot, wondering what this visitor's business could be. Wabsale's brawny figure was arrayed in his best broadcloth, his large fingers were covered with immense kid gloves, and his thin raven looks had been again anointed with suet taken from his own shop. He held his silk hat awkwardly in one hand, while he made a respectful salutation with the other.

'What can I do for you, Wabsale?' asked the landlord.

'If you please, sir,' said the knight of the cleaver, stepping forward a pace or two, 'I wanted to have a word with—'

'With me, I suppose. Well, out with it quickly, my man, for his lordship's drag will start in a few minutes, and time is precious.'

'Not with you, sir,—blest if I do; but with—'

'Oh, you have come for orders, I suppose, and want Mrs. Melody. She is—'

'It ain't your wife neither, sir,' answered the butcher, laying his silk hat upon the desk. 'I want to speak to his lordship.'

'You must be mad, Wabsale.'

'Not quite, sir,' he replied, 'though I am down on my luck, certainly, and have had no end o' trouble about my Saul. Nothin' has gone well with me or him since Mr. Eagles refused to 'elp him forrard a bit with the city fifty. The poor lad would never have got into trouble and had ten years' penal servitude if he'd had a good start in his business; I'm blest if he would.'

'But what has that to do with Lord Garlford?' asked the innkeeper.

'Well, not much, perhaps, sir; but I want to see him very partic'lar for all that.'

'Are you going by the coach?'

'No, I ain't; but I have summat to say to

his lordship which concerns him very close, and I won't take no denial.'

'But his lordship is in his private room and cannot be disturbed,' said the landlord, who felt bound to look after the interests of his noble client.

'All the better if he *is* in his private room, for what I've got to say to him is very private indeed,' returned Wabsale.

'Has his lordship made an appointment with you?'

'No, he ain't.'

'Well, what is your business?' asked Mr. Melody, aware that the man really was determined to carry out his purpose, whatever it might be.

'I mustn't tell you.'

'But if you have a message for his lordship I can deliver it.'

No, I won't part with the secret to you or anybody else, sir; blest if I do. There's something that would astonish you all, if you did but know it. Perhaps it may be made worth my while to hold my tongue.'

'I will go upstairs and ask his lordship if he will see you,' said the innkeeper at length,

'but you must expect to be disappointed, Wabsale.'

'You just take this with you, and give it him into his hand,' said the butcher, taking a greasy sealed envelope out of a side pocket of his coat, and handing it to Melody. 'When his lordship reads that letter, I knows jolly well as he'll see me.'

The landlord reluctantly did as the man desired. Wabsale waited in the office while he took the letter upstairs to Lord Garlford. Presently the innkeeper returned, and, speaking in a more friendly manner than before, although he could not conceal his astonishment on account of what he had just heard and seen, addressed the knight of the cleaver in these words :—

'You are to go upstairs to his lordship, Mr. Wabsale. His lordship will be glad of a few minutes' conversation with you.'

The butcher put on his silk hat and adjusted his immense gloves, saying, 'I told you so, Mr. Melody. I knowed jolly well as that letter would do the business.' He then walked up the yard, turned in at the chief entrance, and ascended the stairs to his lord-

ship's room. The innkeeper followed him into the hall, and heard the door close behind him. He then walked down to the stables, in a state of inward amazement, pondering deeply upon the words Wabsale had spoken. It was necessary, however, to bestir himself, and to look after his men, for time was pressing. The clocks were striking four as the team of chesnuts were led up the inn-yard and harnessed to the drag, but neither Lord Garlford nor the butcher had yet appeared. Another ten minutes elapsed. The earl had never previously been behind time, and considerable surprise was expressed by the passengers, ostlers, and others, at the unusual delay. A minute afterwards Wabsale came down, and passing out of the yard, went his way without bestowing a word or a look upon any person whatever. The lord came quickly after him; mounted the drag in silence; and at the usual signal, the chesnuts went off at a trot and were soon out of sight.

Melody, still pondering deeply, proceeded in search of his wife. She was in the bar, but he beckoned her mysteriously into a private

room, and when she had entered it with him, he locked the door.

'For Heaven's sake, Nat, tell me what is the matter!' cried she in alarm.

'Nothing, my love, that touches *us* very nearly; but I am afraid there is something wrong in his lordship's affairs. Sit down, my dear, and I will tell you.'

He then related what had passed between himself and Wabsale, concluding with the fact that the earl had actually consented to the interview the latter had demanded.

'His lordship changed colour, my love, when he read the letter, and became greatly agitated. He requested me to send the man up to him at once.'

'Then, Nat, you may depend it is about money.'

'How, my dear?'

'Why, we know how poor he is,' said pretty Mrs. Melody. 'He has become a bankrupt, probably, and his effects are to be sold.'

'But Wabsale is not a sheriff's officer, my love.'

'No, but he was chosen as a messenger by some one, Nat, you may take my word.'

'Well, my love. I cannot say; but, hark you!' added the cautious innkeeper, 'we must be very careful. Do not throw out the slightest hint of this to any one. Let us keep our own counsel.'

At this juncture Valentine Laxey's voice was heard in the bar. 'He has come to tea,' said Melody. 'Why, it is actually half-past five o'clock; and the sale begins at six! We must make haste.'

They composed their features, and, each wearing a smile of welcome, they stepped into the bar, and shook hands warmly with the councillor.

Now, our jovial young friend was at this time, for a wonder, in a sober, sensible mood. Two causes had produced this change: first, the circumstance that he was about to attend the auction in the capacity of a shrewd man of business, to do the best he could as proxy for the innkeeper. Secondly, he had been rebuked the day before, both by Mrs. Melody and Rose, for having carried a joke too far, and for treating serious things in a spirit of levity. The wag had sent the following note to Mr. Melody, who of course had vehicles of all

kinds on hire :—' Dear Sir,—Please send me a hearse and two mourning coaches, as I wish to take some friends out for a drive.' So sharply had he been taken to task for this rather ghastly joke, that the gamesome councillor was at this moment a pattern of staidness and sobriety.

'We haven't an instant to spare,' said he, as they sat down to the tea-table. 'We ought to be at the Golden Horse in twenty minutes.

So they despatched the meal as quickly as possible. As they were getting up to go, Valentine remarked carelessly,

'The Golden Horse is the inn where that artist from London has put up, isn't it?'

'I believe so,' returned Melody.

'Do you remember the man's name?'

'Dangerfield.'

'Ay! so it is. Well, come along. I am ready.'

They soon reached the inn, which, as we have said, was of an unpretending character, situated in a back street just below Thacker's Yard. The auction room was at the back of the premises, at the top of a flight of rickety stairs. The two companions ascended arm in arm, and found a large company already

assembled, some standing about in groups, others seated at the long table that ran down the middle of the apartment, and was strewn with bills and placards, as though the place were a reading room and these were the newspapers. Rows of wine glasses and several decanters also stood upon the table.

'Don't touch the sherry,' whispered Melody to his friend. 'Drink port.'

'I shall take neither, thank you,' returned Laxey. 'Look at those fellows now. Half of them will get nearly drunk at the poor widow's expense; and won't even make a bid, much less buy anything! It makes me mad to see them!'

Saying this in his customary impassioned manner, the councillor seated himself on one of the benches that ran along the wall. The action was followed by the innkeeper; but presently he left his companion, from motives of prudence, and went over to another part of the room, where he remained till the sales were over.

The auctioneer now entered. The buzz of conversation ceased. All settled themselves in silence.

'Fill your glasses, gentlemen,' cried the auctioneer; and they did so. Then the first lot was put up, and the business was fairly begun.

Valentine sat listening and watching. Mr. Pepper's property was numbered far down on the list, so there was time to think and to look about him.

If wine is a revealer, so is an auction-room—as much so, perhaps, as a racecourse or a roulette table. Laxey could here see men's passions in full play, and could moralize at his leisure. Some of these lots were 'big things.' It was rather an important sale altogether, the properties being considerable—not paltry household furniture, but land and tenements worth thousands of pounds. Valentine knew nearly all the bidders. So-and-so did not really possess two hundred pounds in the world, but he was now buying to a large extent. 'He will borrow the bulk of the money,' thought Valentine, 'and mortgage the property as soon as it is his.' There was a sharp-eyed lawyer in one corner, peering at the company from behind a newspaper. 'Ha! ha!' thought

the councillor, 'he is thinking of the fat mortgage deeds he will have to draw up. How like a hawk the man looks!'

During this time, lot after lot was being knocked down,—now some 'eligible' building land, now a 'desirable' freehold property, now a 'handsome' country residence, and so on. When the hammer fell, it was too late for some reckless bidder, who had been carried away by the torrent of competition—so adroitly managed by the auctioneer—to repent of his purchase, though his neighbours called him a 'flat,' and roars of laughter echoed through the room. The unlucky victim must not betray all he suffered as he overheard the remark, 'He won't get two per cent for his money, after repairs and expenses.' There was a wife at home anxiously awaiting the result of this very sale. How would he meet her? How could he summon courage to expose his folly? How would he bear her reproaches? 'The man has half ruined himself by that investment,' people whisper; but though rage, disappointment, and mortification are gnawing at his heart-strings, he

must endeavour to smile and carry a brave front. So he quaffs his wine with the desperation of a gamester who has had a run of ill luck. Soon there will be a hum of admiration and envy as the hammer falls once more. '*He'll* get seventy per cent. on that outlay. Lucky fellow!'

Laxey saw it all—the play of feature, the rage, hatred, jealousy, exultation, despair, and all the other passions that man can feel under such circumstances,—the flushed face and hilarity of one, the pallid, downcast countenance of another, as the pencil made mark after mark in the margins of the catalogues.

But now the freehold residence of the deceased Mr. Pepper was brought under the notice of the company, and Valentine braced himself for the ordeal with a beating heart and accelerated pulse. He remembered Melody's counsel to 'keep cool,' and on no account to go beyond the price he had named to him. Then the bidding commenced. It was a dreadful ten minutes to the innkeeper—almost an eternity it seemed to him. The competition was lively, and

the price rose with alarming rapidity. But eventually the property was knocked down to Valentine's bidding for a trifle under the maximum figure previously fixed upon.

Melody wiped his brow, and drew a deep breath of relief. Having arranged matters with the auctioneer's clerk, the two friends left the room in company.

As they walked arm in arm up the inn-yard, a gentleman in evening dress came out of a doorway and passed on before them to his cab. Soon the cab turned into the street and was gone.

'That swell is going out to dinner somewhere,' said Melody.

'Don't you know him?'

'No,' returned the innkeeper. 'Who is it?'

'Mr. Dangerfield.'

CHAPTER XV.

SUSPICIONS.

'THE ceremony is more solemn and impressive in a church, papa.'

'Stuff and nonsense!'

'It really is, to my mind, papa. A wedding at Thacker's Yard seems a crude and incomplete affair, although I am so fond of the dear old place,' said Virginia.

'I am of the same opinion,' said Mr. Dangerfield.

'Then you are not a consistent dissenter, sir,' retorted the mayor.

'Perhaps not; but I have nearly all the ladies in the country on my side. It may be a foolish preference of theirs, but they seem to agree that the authoritative blessing of the church carries a sense of security with it which they greatly value.'

'And which Thacker's Yard does not give to anything like the same degree,' added Felicia.

'I never heard anything more absurd in my life,' protested Mr. Eagles.

'Well, papa, absurd or not,' replied Virginia, with unusual spirit, 'though I am a sincere nonconformist, I should not feel as if I were really married to Charles if the wedding took place at Thacker's Yard.'

'The place is so bare,' said the mayoress.

'And the service so meagre,' added the artist.

'And Mr. Shearwater so wanting in authority and dignity, in spite of his gold eye-glass,' said Felicia airily.

Mr. Eagles was very angry.

'Listen to me,' he said sternly. 'I gave my consent, Virginia, to your marriage—'

'Yes, papa.'

'You, Charles Dangerfield, were anxious that the ceremony should take place at a very early date.'

'I was, sir, and still am.'

'Very well. It has been arranged, in compliance with your urgent wish, that my daugh-

ter shall marry you in the last week of August.'

'In four weeks' time, sir.'

'Yes, in four weeks' time. Now, mark, I am quite aware that my daughter is of age, and can set my authority at defiance on this matter if she is so disposed.'

'Oh papa!' cried Virginia, with a burst of tears.

'Hitherto, however,' continued the mayor, 'she has been a good, gentle, submissive child; and I can hardly believe she will run counter to my express wishes on a subject so important. She shall *not* be married in any church in this city with my consent and approval. The wedding shall either be at Thacker's Yard, or not in Davenstone at all.'

This was said by Mr. Eagles in a somewhat tempestuous manner, and closed the discussion for that time; but it was soon discovered that the artist could be persistent and obstinate to a degree they had not dreamed of. He clung so pertinaciously to the opinions he had expressed, and was so resolved not to give way, that it was feared the engagement between him and Virginia

would be broken off. This alarming state of affairs coming to the knowledge of Miss Eagles (the mayor's sister Barbara, at Bayswater), who had already been apprised by letter of the intended marriage, that good lady proposed to cut the Gordian knot by repeating her invitation that the girls should pay their visit to her without delay, and that the wedding should take place from her house. This generous proposal was received with favour by the ladies at the mayor's mansion, who perceived it to be the only way out of the difficulty that had arisen. Mr. Eagles, however, at first treated it with scorn; but not having such a fund of obstinacy in his disposition as Mr. Dangerfield had shown, he at length yielded to the entreaties of his wife and daughter, and Miss Eagles' invitation was thankfully accepted. The artist incidentally stated that this arrangement would also be a great convenience to him, since his professional duties in Davenstone were now ended, his drawings of the different places of interest in the town being completed and sent up to the office of 'The Picturesque.' It was desirable, therefore, that he should go

up to London, where his occupations would be of a pressing nature for some time.

Peace being restored upon this new basis, affairs at the mayor's residence proceeded with their ordinary regularity, except that preparations for the visit to Miss Eagles, and for the wedding (intended to be a very quiet one) were steadily progressing.

In the course of a few days the two girls said 'Good-bye' to their father and Mrs. Eagles, and started for London. The lady mayoress was to follow them shortly, but the mayor pleaded his public duties as an excuse, and at present it was extremely doubtful whether he would be present at the wedding or not.

The artist also departed for London that same week, sensible that a slight coolness had been shown towards him of late by Mr. Eagles.

The second letter received by the lady mayoress from Virginia, apprised her that the banns of marriage had been published for the first time on the previous Sunday at Aunt Barbara's church in Bayswater, and also at the parish church in Chelsea, where Mr. Dangerfield resided.

On the morning after the receipt of this second letter, the following anonymous communication reached Mr. Eagles through the post office :—

'Have a care, sir; have a care! There is a wolf in sheep's clothing prowling about your fold. Keep a sharp watch over your flock. Things are not what they seem; and all is not gold that glitters. Unless you guard your nest with unceasing vigilance, the fowler will rob you of your fledgling. I will not see you cheated and betrayed without giving you warning. The net is spread, and one you love dearly will be ensnared, if you do not take good heed.

'This is from A FRIEND.'

The mayor read this missive through again and again with astonishment and apprehension. The handwriting was entirely strange to him, and the only apparent clue upon the envelope was the post office stamp, which simply bore the word 'Davenstone,' with the date. He showed the letter to Mrs. Eagles, who shared his uneasiness and anxiety. It was decided that he should at

once go to London, and prosecute his inquiries respecting Mr. Dangerfield. No time must be lost.

'I will try,' said the mayor to his wife, as he was taking leave of her, 'if I cannot put off this marriage. I shall be glad to prevent it altogether.'

He started off immediately, and that same afternoon he was closeted with his elder daughter in a little sitting-room at the back of Aunt Barbara's house in Bayswater. Virginia was weeping bitterly.

'You may perhaps think, my child,' said her father, with a sad stern face, 'that I ought not pay any attention to an anonymous letter.'

'I do think so, papa.'

'Exactly. Under ordinary circumstances I should have thrown it behind the fire, and thought no more about it. As a rule such correspondence deserves no better fate. But here the case is different.'

'Why, papa?'

'This man is a stranger, my child, whom an accident made us acquainted with, but of whom we know almost nothing. I have

long thought that he was concealing something from us; I now feel positive upon the subject. What a life-long misery will be yours if you link your fate to one who may be practising some deception upon us all.'

'Charles is no deceiver, papa; he is everything that is manly, true, and noble.'

'I wish I could think so,' said the mayor.

'My heart tells me Charles is incapable of a mean artifice, papa.'

'But, my dear, think how often women have been misled and victimised by fraud. Yours might be such a case.'

'Never, papa! oh, never!'

'Virginia,' said Mr. Eagles, 'listen to me. The banns have been published once, and the day of your marriage has been fixed, but I am so persuaded it would be folly to disregard this warning, that I shall make fresh inquiries. Now, until I have obtained proofs that there is no trick or double-dealing on Dangerfield's part, you had best not see him again. He comes here, I suppose?'

'Yes; and, papa, I will not give him up.'

'Virginia—'

'He is not false, papa.'

'Well, my child, I will say no more about him now, but I am going to-day to gather some additional evidence one way or the other, and until I return, let the matter rest.'

Her father then left her. Virginia paced the room in extreme excitement and distress. She was determined not to discard her lover. Indeed, no sufficient reason had been given why she should do so. She certainly would not act upon suspicion and conjecture. Charles, who had approached her with gentle speech and honeyed words, was still unchanged. He was as sweet and noble as ever in her eyes. Nay, she would love him all the more because of their unkind remarks of him and coldness towards him. She would be true to him, though all her family should turn against him. Besides, her father had no sufficient ground for this change of front. An anonymous letter was all he had in the shape of argument. No! She would never surrender him, but would be steadfast through all.

With these thoughts in her mind, she went to seek Felicia.

Between Virginia and her sister there had ever been the truest affection. They had been all in all to each other; having lost their mother in early childhood. The present Mrs. Eagles, a mild, sentimental woman, had never been able to guide or control them. Her judgment was weak; she was indolent too, and spent much of her time in her own chamber.

A stepmother may be kind and good to her husband's children, but it is not often that they will be found to confide in and cling to her with filial fondness.

The mayoress, moreover, had not yet followed the girls to Bayswater, and could not be asked for counsel; so, as we have said, Virginia took her troubles to her sister.

Felicia promptly told her that she ought not to give up her lover. The letter was nothing —it might even be a hoax.

'Papa would not have changed his front so suddenly, perhaps, but for our little dispute, dear.'

It was quite late when the mayor came in from his round of inquiries, but of course the girls were sitting up for him. He looked worn and jaded. They kissed and fondled him, and

quickly brought him refreshment. Then they asked him had he gleaned any additional information? He replied, No; he had found out nothing that was material either one way or the other.

'Then, papa, dismiss all your suspicions, there's a dear!' they cried; and Felicia added, gaily,

'About that letter, now, that has caused us this fright,—I am almost sure that I know who sent it.'

Her father looked at her inquiringly. So did Virginia. 'Who?' they asked.

'It was Valentine Laxey!'

The mayor was thunderstruck; Virginia exultant.

'You know,' continued Felicia, triumphantly, 'how inveterate is his habit of playing practical jokes. I have not the least doubt that he has been hoaxing us, and is at the present moment laughing at our gullibility.'

The supposition was not at all unreasonable or unlikely, and the family retired to rest, deriving some measure of consolation from that assurance.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRADE MEETING.

SEBASTIAN BOTONER was now on the high road to wealth and fame. Parliament, sensible of the public utility of his invention, had passed a bill granting all the powers needed for successfully carrying out his scheme. The shares in the Steam Tramway Company were being rapidly taken up; the line for traffic was in a fair way towards completion,—in short, our hero was a man of mark, not only in Davenstone but throughout the country. Lines similar to that in course of construction between Davenstone and Leeton (a small but rising town about nine miles distant) were also being laid simultaneously in several cities and towns of considerable importance; and upon all these lines the locomotive and car which Sebastian had patented

were to be in use. Already he was deriving a fair income from his invention, but a far more plenteous harvest remained to be reaped.

But so active was Botoner's mind, and so exhaustless his energy, that this undertaking, however important, was not sufficient to employ the whole of his powers. He was at this time engaged upon another scheme of a different kind.

Davenstone, the quaint dear old town which he loved so well, was largely dependent, and had been for many years, upon the manufacture of watches. This was one of its staple trades. Now, from causes into which we need not inquire—for they have no concern with the tale I am writing—this business had lately fallen into decay. 'It is the Americans,' cried the men of Davenstone, 'who are cutting the ground from under our feet. Their machine-made watches are beating as out of the market.' The manufacturers loudly declared that machinery must be introduced into the town. But the American machinery was intricate and expensive; and its introduction therefore would involve too great an outlay. In this emergency our hero devised a machine

of a plain and simple character, which answered the purpose as well, and was within the compass of the manufacturers' means. They urged him to bring his scheme to a state of perfection. Mr. Eagles especially hoped for brilliant results, if it were patented and brought into general use. The cry went forth, 'Botoner is the man who will save the town.' The mayor called upon him at his house in the Quadrant — (in his improved circumstances, Sebastian had found his old lodgings too small, and had removed to a handsome residence nearly opposite 'The Green')—the mayor called upon him, and said,—

'Mr. Botoner, we must start a company and raise the capital, and then our trade will return to us.'

'In twelve months' time, Mr. Eagles,' he replied, 'we shall be making such watches by machinery, as our cousins across the water could not turn out to save their lives.'

'There will be a meeting of the trade in St. John's Hall next week,' said the mayor; 'will you come and give us an address?'

'You must excuse me—I am no speaker,' was his answer.

However, being pressed to do so for the good of the town, he at length consented, and in the course of the week, prepared his speech with great care.

The grand old hall was crowded in every part on the night of the trade meeting. Sebastian, when he rose to deliver his address, was greeted with tumultuous cheers. In a vigorous, fervid manner, he spoke these words:—

'Watchmakers of Davenstone! I want first to give you an idea how sublime is the labour by which you earn your daily bread, and how much your trade contributes to the comfort and happiness of mankind. If I am a little dry at first, I shall have something to say afterwards which you will be glad to hear. ('Go on.')

'I will. The practice of measuring time by hours, minutes, and seconds is of comparatively recently date; yet we find improvements early made in the computation of larger periods of time, by observations of the heavenly bodies. The progress of astronomy disclosed many sources of error that had been overlooked in the movements of the more conspicuous planets, when these

movements were employed to mark intervals of time. Thus time was anciently divided into years, according to the motion of the sun among the constellations; into months, according to the motion of the moon relatively to the sun's place in the heavens; and into days, by the alternate light and darkness caused by the rising and setting of the sun. ('We know all that.')

'The earliest attempt made to divide the day itself, was by tracing the shadow of an upright object, which gave a rough measure of time by the variations of its length and position, or in other words, by means of the sun-dial. Hour glasses belonged to this plan of determining gross amounts of time by a rough and ready mechanism; and the clepsydra was contrived for the same purpose. In the former case, the running of fine sand from one vessel to another was the method adopted; and in the latter, the measurement of short periods of time was effected by the quantity of water dropped from one vessel into another.

('What about watchmaking?' said a voice in the crowd impatiently.)

'I am coming to that. The origin of clock-work is involved in great obscurity. Some maintain that clocks were invented by Bœthius early in the sixth century, and that Pope Paul I., about the year 760, made a present of one to Pepin, King of France, which was then supposed to be the only clock in the world. Others give the honour to Pacificus, of Verona, in the ninth century, and assert that the striking part was invented by the Saracens. It is certain that a curious clock was sent to Charlemagne from the Caliph Haroun al Raschid, which the historians speak of with admiration. Mention is made of a clock having been put up at Westminster in the year 1288, during the reign of Edward I.

'Striking clocks were known in Italy as early as the thirteenth, or the beginning of the fourteenth century.' ('You got all that out of a 'Cyclopædia,' said the voice.)

Sebastian felt more deeply than ever that he was not good at public speaking. This matter was not suitable to the occasion. He now came directly to the point.

'We want the trade to return to the

town,' he said; and thunders of applause greeted the statement. 'I will tell you how to bring it back.'

The rest of his speech was practical, and he met with no more interruptions. Nevertheless, when he sat down, and another speaker was on his legs, he whispered to a friend beside him on the platform,—'Nothing shall induce me to address a public meeting again.'

'You did not deliver all the matter you had prepared, did you?' asked his sly friend.

'No, I had written this besides,' replied the inventor, with a blush, and furtively showing his manuscript.

The friend shook his head with a smile as he looked it over.

'I am afraid it is not much more relevant to the business in hand than the other,' he said candidly.

This is what Botoner had written:—

'De Wyck's clock, made in 1364 for the Emperor of Germany, was a large striking clock, going for one day, and with one hand (the hour hand), and much the same as many old church clocks at present. It had two pallets,

worked by a crown-wheel, and two weights on a lever to regulate the movement to time. It appears there is still a clock in existence at Dover Castle, bearing the date 1348, earlier by sixteen or more years than that of De Wyck's.

'A pocket watch is very similar in principle to a good clock, except that the regulation of the former is by a balance and spring, and that of the latter by a pendulum. It would be a matter of some difficulty to determine what artist first reduced the portable spring-clock to the dimensions of a watch to be worn in the pocket. The small clocks prior to the time of Huygens and Hooke were very imperfect machines; they did not even profess to subdivide the hours into minutes and seconds until the invention of the balance-spring, which is to the balance what gravity is to the pendulum, and its introduction has contributed as much to the improvement of watches as did that of the pendulum to clocks.'

But though unsuccessful as a speaker, Sebastian's genius as an inventor was beyond dispute. In his capacity as chairman of the

meeting, Mr. Eagles paid a glowing tribute to his surpassing talents, and spoke of the great services his young friend had rendered to the town.

Before the meeting separated, three hearty cheers were given to our hero, who bowed his acknowledgments, but did not venture to open his lips. 'Let the cobbler stick to his last,' he thought; and he left the hall with more self-knowledge than he possessed when he entered it.

It was pretty generally known in the town that Mr. Botoner was engaged to be married to the mayor's second daughter. The reader will have surmised that Felicia had not gone up to London without a few parting words with her lover. It was arranged that very soon after her return to Davenstone, the services of Mr. Shearwater were to be called into requisition, to unite her and the inventor in the bonds of holy matrimony. Certain events, however, that are now to be faithfully narrated, and that had immediate reference to Mr. Dangerfield and Virginia, had the effect of postponing their wedding in a most unexpected manner.

In order to explain how those incidents produced this result, it is desirable that we should enter Aunt Barbara's house at Bayswater, and bring this chapter to a close.

CHAPTER XVII.

AUNT BARBARA'S CHURCH.

FULLY possessed with the idea that some mystery attached to Mr. Dangerfield's circumstances, the mayor went up to London, as we have seen, to make all possible inquiries respecting him. Those inquiries, however, had not resulted in any new discovery, and he was fain to return home to his municipal duties a baffled and dissatisfied man. He saw that his daughter's love for the artist was not only unshaken, but positively increased and intensified. She had spurned the insinuations contained in the anonymous letter, as malicious or else mischievous ravings that were beneath contempt. What could he do more? Virginia was of age; the banns were proclaimed; his suspicions had not been verified; the women of

the family were all against him. All these facts contributed to render him powerless to prevent the marriage from taking place. But at any rate he would not actively countenance it by being present at the ceremony. If his daughter was determined to fling herself into the arms of this stranger, in spite of his warnings, she would do so on her own responsibility, and must take the consequences. Revolving these anxious thoughts in his mind, Mr. Eagles went back to Davenstone.

Felicia, meanwhile, was indignant with her father for what she considered his unjust, unfounded suspicions of her sister's lover, and for his recent alienation from him. As for the anonymous letter, she was more convinced than ever that it was another of Laxey's pranks. On her return home, she would sharply question the jocose councillor upon the subject, and scold him well for his meddlesome folly.

Mr. Dangerfield came frequently to Aunt Barbara's house during these days. His manner to Virginia was gentle and sweet; towards her sister kind and playful. He took the two sisters, as a matter of course, to

the house which was to be the new home of the married couple. It was a handsome residence at Richmond, and was being richly furnished under the superintendence of Virginia and the artist.

'What a beautiful home it will be!' said Felicia, when she saw it for the first time.

Mr. Dangerfield listened with a quiet smile, and remained silent.

'It is even prettier than papa's and mine —the dear old place standing by the churchyard at Davenstone,' continued the lively girl.

'Charles' taste is so perfect,' said Virginia, 'and he is so good to me.'

Thus they chatted as they went over the mansion. They lingered with delight in every room, for evidences of refinement, wealth, and care met the eye at every turn. Some hours had passed before they reached Aunt Barbara's on that warm balmy evening in August. Mr. Dangerfield parted from them at the door, and the two girls went up together to their bedroom.

'He has not been sparing of expense, at any rate,' said Felicia.

'Oh, no.'

'I call him a dear, good creature.'

'He is everything that is noble and kind, and I love him dearly,' said Virginia, her magnificent eyes shining with happiness.

'If papa only would come round a little, dear.'

Virginia sighed.

'But he is so hard to move,' continued Felicia.

'He will relent before we are married.'

'Do you think so, love?'

'Yes. Valentine Laxey will own to the trick he has played upon us, when papa asks him about it.'

'I shall be quite angry with papa if he does not come to the wedding,' said Felicia.

'He will come, of course.'

Felicia stole up to her sister, and put her soft arms round her neck.

'Oh, Vir!' she cried passionately, 'you are sure that you love Charles devotedly and entirely, are you?'

'Yes.'

'Could you make a very great sacrifice for his sake, and venture everything to please him?'

'Oh, yes. He has my whole — *whole* heart.'

'I really think he has, dear,' said her sister, kissing her fondly.

'He might take me to the very ends of the earth as his wife. I could give up all for him, his companionship is so sweet to me. Oh, how I love him! It is so strange that papa should turn against him. And really, you know, I owe my life to Charles. That dreadful iron bar would have killed me, had he not taken it in his strong hand just at that moment.'

'Yes, dear, he came in the very nick of time, just like a hero of romance,' said Felicia, with a merry laugh.

'Well, remembering what I owe to Charles, and seeing that he is to be my husband, it is natural I should take his part against papa, is it not? and that I should think papa is dealing hardly with him?'

'Quite natural, dear.'

'But I am going to write to papa saying that I shall marry Charles because I love him dearly; that I trust what I am doing will have his entire sanction; that there may

be no shadow of estrangement between us; and beseeching him to give me away to Charles at the wedding, in the way one's father should do.'

'And if he refuses, dear, or counsels delay —what then?'

'Charles says there are important reasons connected with his profession why it should not be put off. He is so high-spirited, too, and seems so much the more set upon a thing when he is contradicted or reasoned with, that it would do no good to ask that. He would take it as an insult, now that we have both been asked in church.'

The two girls continued their confidential talk for some time, and then Virginia sat down and wrote her letter to her father. She received a reply from him in due course, but it was not very favourable. He repeated what he had said before, and considered the step she was about to take was an imprudent one. Nevertheless he wished her every blessing in her married life. She had been a good daughter, obedient in all things save this matter of marrying a stranger against whose character there were grave

suspicions. Finally, he found on consulting his memoranda that pressing public engagements would prevent his coming to London to give her away at the wedding. Their mother, however, would be present; indeed she was leaving Davenstone for Aunt Barbara's that very day on which he was writing his letter. He supposed Virginia was running short of cash, so inclosed a cheque for fifty pounds.

'Well,' said Felicia, 'on the whole it is no worse than I expected.'

Her sister's eyes were full of tears, but she wiped them away quickly, saying,—'It is a great disappointment to me not to have papa at the wedding; but I have done all I could.'

On the next Sunday morning they all went together to Aunt Barbara's church. It was a small, low-browed, ivy-covered edifice, showing signs of neglect outside, and with decided tokens of decay within. The vicar, the Rev. Rufus Huron, although a favourite with Aunt Barbara on account of the sturdy uncompromising simplicity of his doctrine and ritual, was not generally popular in

the parish. He was an aged man, who clung to the old ways, and resisted with a pertinacity that, perhaps, was not always courteous, any efforts or suggestions made with the view of bringing the services in harmony with modern ideas. The good clergyman had offended so many people—churchwardens and seat-holders—by what they considered his gruff, imperious, wrong-headed ways, that at this time the congregation had dwindled to a mere handful. Aunt Barbara, a tall, slender, old-fashioned lady, was almost the only friend he had left, using many arts in order to entrap the unwary into attendance upon his ministry, that there might be one empty pew the less, at any rate; and on all possible occasions fighting her pastor's battles with great spirit. Great was her pride on this particular Sunday morning as she conducted the lady mayoress, Virginia, and Felicia into her pew. It was at the upper end of the little church, close to the reading desk. The vestry was nearly opposite—its door stood wide open, so that Felicia's sharp eyes could descry every object therein most distinctly. She looked at

it, too, with a feeling of special interest, for this was the church in which her sister was to be married; that vestry they would all have to enter, when the ceremony should be ended, to sign their names in the registers. She saw, hanging on a row of brass hooks, Mr. Huron's surplice, stole, crimson hood, and black gown. Round the walls were wooden seats boarded in front down to the ground. 'Probably,' thought Felicia, 'the seats are the lids of receptacles for coal, wood, and other miscellaneous articles.' In the middle of the vestry was a little square table covered with red baize, on which were an inkstand and several books. Two or three ecclesiastical chairs, a small cupboard, a calendar, and a portrait of a former incumbent, completed the appointments of the room, which was lighted from without by a lozenge-shaped window of stained glass.

An old man was standing at the baize-covered table, dusting the inkstand. It was the clerk. He was tall, thin, and gray-headed, with a sharp wrinkled face and a hooked nose, upon which rested a pair of spectacles.

He peered over these as he wiped the penholder carefully.

John Kneebone had been 'clerk of this parish' for forty years. He and the vicar had grown old together, and there were many points of sympathy between them. John had a great reverence for Mr. Huron's erudition, waiting upon him with fussy delighted assiduity, which the clergyman repaid by a kindly, patronising, half-brotherly regard.

Felicia, watching the old clerk, saw him lift the lid of one of the seats, and draw from the receptacle beneath a second surplice, which he proceeded to hang up beside the other. 'That is for the curate,' thought she, 'and the old man is fond of him, judging by his pleasant smile, and the care he takes to smooth out the creases as he hangs it up.'

Yes, John liked the curate, because, unlike all former stipendaries, the latter refrained from vexing the soul of the good vicar by resistance or opposition, which was a folly so patent to the old clerk, that hot-headed curates had nothing but their youth and inexperience to excuse them. Good, faithful John! What quantity of breath he had wasted in the

vain endeavour to restrain the ardour of Mr. Huron's previous assistants! How pathetic had been his warnings; how tearful his allowance of the vicar's weaknesses! 'Oh, sir, I beg and pray that you will be careful!' This was his formula when a youthful curate, fresh from the University and burning with zeal, came to 'settle' at Aunt Barbara's church. 'I knows Mr. Huron, the vicar, sir, better than you do. I've put on his chronicals' (canonicals, it is to be presumed, he meant), 'I've put on his chronicals for him for forty year, and ought to be acquinted with his ways, which I certingly am, and, oh sir, don't go alterin' and improvin', for he won't stand it. Let us live in peace. Why not? Why should we have strife and contriversity?' Poor Kneebone! the youthful zealots had scornfully disregarded his well-meant advice, and had audaciously attempted certain reforms only to encounter defeat and disaster. 'Dear me, oh dear me!' cried John in anguish. 'What's the use, sir, of kicking over the traces in that way? Mr. Huron wants humourin'; he won't be druv, sir. All our sweet repose is gone! Contriversity, sir, will be our portion now,

I fear. And the vicar, sir, has the whiph-and of us; it's no good at all to be rebellin' and sweepin' up the dust. Let it lie for quietness' sake. Heigho!'

The old clerk was grievously troubled in spirit, too, because of the frequent changes that this love of innovation on the part of the assistants necessitated in the view of Mr. Huron. 'Oh dear! a new face is always comin' before we've got used to the old one!'

It was very distressing, also, to have to listen to the indignant complaints of curates whose pet schemes were all checkmated one after the other. Old John was pained to hear Mr. Huron called 'a treacherous skinflint' or an 'odious cantankerous fossil,' by unreasonable and irreverent youngsters. It was certainly not pleasant to hear the worthy incumbent compared to a tortoise on his hind legs.

Yet this was a favourite comparison with the indignant ones by reasons of the vicar's practice of hybernating in his dormitory during the winter months from motives of prudence; also because of his extremely slow movements, and his habit of wearing two

thick overcoats, which had a hard and shell-like appearance.

Felicia saw old John put on his black gown, trimmed with velvet (of which he was very proud), and then Mr. Huron and the curate came into the vestry through the outer door. By this time the church was occupied by about fifty people—the usual congregation; the bell ceased ringing, and the clergy having been carefully robed by the clerk, came in and took their places.

In good sooth the service was of a dreary description, showing that the zealous curates had some grounds for the action they had taken, however unfortunate in its results. Presently the family in Aunt Barbara's seat heard these words read from the desk in a clear voice by the assistant,—

'I publish the banns of marriage for the third and last time between Charles Dangerfield, bachelor, of the parish of St. John, Chelsea, and Virginia Eagles, spinster, of this parish. If any of you know cause or just impediment, etc.' Afterwards came the sermon by the vicar,—a dry, monotonous, sleepy performance, to which no one, save and ex-

cept Aunt Barbara, paid the slightest attention; and then the impatient, exhausted congregation were suffered to disperse.

As they walked homewards, Virginia said to her sister,

'What was the word papa used, dear, to describe Charles' supposed intention?'

'He said he thought he might be using some artifice to betray me,' replied Virginia.

'Well,' continued Felicia, 'we will take care that the knot is properly tied at anyrate.'

'Yes.'

'All is regular, so far—the banns duly proclaimed—everything straightforward and legal,' said Felicia. 'The only duty remaining is to see that the marriage itself, when it takes place, is equally valid.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

'MAN AND WIFE.'

JOHN KNEEBONE—good faithful John—kept a small grocery and provision shop in a back street, close to the church where he officiated as clerk with so much credit and dignity. Being a bachelor of thrifty habits, he had not only saved money, but was also the owner of several tenements in that homely neighbourhood. He was spruce and cleanly in person, although he dwelt alone and 'did for himself' in the snug room in the rear of the shop, as well as served single-handed behind the counter, where he dealt forth ha'porths of this and pen'orths of that, with scrupulous exactness. As clerk of the parish and custodian of the church (the keys were witnesses thereof, for they were hanging among the flitches of

bacon), Kneebone was 'looked up to' by his customers, who thought him almost, if not quite, as great a man as the vicar himself.

An half-past nine o'clock one bright breezy morning in the last week of August, old John put on his coat (he had been busy in his shirt sleeves), clapped his broad brimmed felt hat on his grey head, took down the bunch of keys from among the flitches of bacon, locked up the shop, and started for the church. There was to be a wedding this morning. Charles Dangerfield, bachelor, was to be united to Virginia Eagles, spinster; and the clerk was going to get everything in readiness for the ceremony. On his way he overtook Sappy, the bell-ringer, also bent in John's direction to assist him in his duties, with a view to a possible half-crown from the happy bridegroom. The two old men entered the church together, but Sappy was a sad idle dog, and though he straightway took a broom and made a great show of sweeping, he really did nothing but dream and dawdle. Kneebone therefore despoiled him of the broom, pushed him gently aside, and bade him go dust the seats. This duty also Sappy performed in a perfunctory

absent manner, which seemed to irritate old John, for when the church was swept, he snatched the duster out of the hand of his sluggish assistant, requesting him to go anywhere out of his sight. Sappy probably retired to the belfry to contemplate the solitary rope that dangled down, but which must not be pulled until the wedding should be over, and then with an expenditure of physical force regulated by the amount of Mr. Dangerfield's gratuity.

Relieved of Sappy's presence, the old clerk quickly had the church in a fit state for the reception of the wedding party. He then withdrew into Mr. Huron's sanctum, *i.e.*, the vestry, to 'tidy that up,' as he phrased it. John had acquired habits of regularity in early life; he did everything by rule. For forty years he had gone about his work in the same manner as he did this morning, sweeping and dusting till all was bright and trim. Having arranged the inkstand, he carefully fixed a new pen in the penholder, then lifting the lid of one of the receptacles ranged around the walls, he produced the Registers of Marriages therefrom, placing them in an orderly manner on the

table opposite the vicar's arm-chair. Finally, the old clerk took from his fob an old-fashioned silver watch, of the dimensions of a goodly turnip, detached it, and laid it on the table beside the books. For nearly half a century Mr. Huron had consulted John's watch in preference to his own, the latter being erratic and untrustworthy, while the clerk's, like its owner, plodded on in the same even orderly manner from year to year, always exact, always reliable. The vicar expected to see Kneebone's turnip on the vestry table as he expected to see the sun rise every morning. It is almost doubtful if he could have got through his work without it.

If anything, John bestowed to-day a shade more than his customary care upon his preparations, inasmuch as he expected the wedding to be grander than usual. He knew that the bride was the dark handsome young lady who had sat on the previous Sunday morning in Miss Eagles's seat. Miss Eagles herself would of course be present; also the two other ladies, — one young, with proudly-cut features, the other middle-aged, portly, and fresh-coloured; who had sat with

her on that occasion. As to the bridegroom, the clerk had been told that he was an artist of repute, whose pictures fetched fabulous sums. In short, this was a marriage at which Mr. Huron himself was to officiate, not the curate.

The little church was now half filled with spectators, chiefly girls with babies in their arms, and dirty children. When these had been duly admonished, it was eleven o'clock, and the wedding party was expected to arrive every moment. The clock had not ceased striking the hour when Mr. Dangerfield, faultlessly attired, with a manly bearing and a leisurely easy motion, stepped into the church, followed by an aristocratic-looking stranger who kept close to him, and was evidently his 'best man.' Kneebone made a very low bow, and invited them into the vestry until the bride should be at hand. They accepted the offer, and sat down in the sanctum.

'Mr. Huron will be 'ere in a moment, sir,' said the old clerk, with another bow, addressing the bridegroom.

'The clergyman? Yes. Exactly.'

'He might be a little late, sir, but he'll come all right. The vicar's house is a good way off, sir, and he always walks. He is rather slow, sir, and he ponders the path of his feet as he comes along. Dear me! Oh, dear me, what a man to *think* Mr. Huron is, sir! And his preachin'—what depth! There's no clergyman hereabouts can touch him. Other ministers, sir, they has to read it out off the paper afore 'em, but he preaches distemper.'

'Does he, indeed?'

'Yes, sir, he never reads his sermons; he preaches distemper. And his larnin'! Dear me! Oh, dear me! The congregation open their mouths at him!'

'Yawning, I suppose,' suggested the best man, stroking his moustache.

'That's what the curates always say, because Mr. Huron will stick to the old ways,' replied John. 'Heigho! how they do fly in the face of the vicar, to be sure! They're so oudacious when they first comes from the 'Varsity. They supposes as he ought to think and feel the same as they do. But we knows, sir, as you can't put old 'eads on young shoulders; and

vi-versey, they oughtn't to expect as Mr. Huron should go friskin' about like a hinnercent lamb in a medder.'

'It would be most unreasonable,' the two gentlemen assented.

'But they do, sir; and that's how peace and quietness is lost in this 'ere place; for they get others to think the same, the curates naterally havin' influence. Now, Miss Eagles, sir, the good lady as *your* good lady is stayin' with, sir, she's different, and leads the people in the right direction. I trusts as we may see her example follered. We are told, sir, on the best authority, that "evil complications corrupts good manners;" who can tell what vi-versey may do?'

The gentlemen were about to make some reply, when the outer door opened and the vicar himself entered the vestry. They rose, greeted him in a courteous manner, and then retired into the church; for the roll of carriage wheels was heard — the bride had come! The clerk indued Mr. Huron in his surplice and hood, and then stood still, with his hands meekly clasped before him. Taking out a dainty gold watch from a side pocket, the vicar scrutinised it, shook his head with

disapproval, and then, stooping down, peered inquiringly at John's turnip lying on the table. With a grunt of satisfaction he then turned to the clerk, saying,

'Has the wedding party come?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Go and place them, John, will you, please?'

Kneebone went out, and the vicar waited a moment or two, standing motionless in front of the table.

His tall figure was bent with age, his grey hair was abundant, the features large, the eyes almost hidden beneath heavy overhanging brows. When he moved, his motions were constrained and rigid as those of an automaton.

He marched slowly out of the vestry, wheeled stiffly round to face the ragged company of spectators, at whom he peered with knit brows. Pointing to a demonstrative infant, he said in a loud voice,

'Take out that child.'

The offending baby was removed under John's anxious superintendence.

The old clerk was accustomed to say to Sappy when any wedding was coming on,

'I do hope as the vicar won't anger the people this mornin' before he begins, by shoutin' at 'em. It always puts me in a sweat, and it don't do no good. They only behave the worse for it. How thankful I shall be when the marriage is over, if there is no strife and contriversity!'

Having looked the congregation over with a frowning countenance, Mr. Huron marched up to the communion table, and presently faced the bride and bridegroom with the book in his hand.

Besides Virginia and Mr. Dangerfield, there were present the lady mayoress and Felicia, Aunt Barbara, her brother (a corpulent, smiling, bald-headed gentleman, who had come to give away the bride in the absence of her father), and the aristocratic stranger, who acted as the bridegroom's best man. This party heard the irrevocable '*I will*' pronounced by Virginia and Charles, and also the solemn declaration afterwards made by the clergyman, that they were man and wife in the name of God. Then after the blessing, they all trooped in the rear of Mr. Huron into the vestry.

Virginia wrote her name in the register of marriages; the bridegroom followed with his signature, 'Charles Dangerfield;' and the witnesses added theirs, namely, Felicia, the uncle of the bride, and the best man, who subscribed himself 'Robert Chutney.' Thus the ceremony was happily ended amid the usual congratulations and good wishes.

To Mr. Huron's vast amazement, the bridegroom thrust a bank note into his hand. Into the horny palm of John Kneebone he dropped a guinea, and a coin of smaller value into that of the indolent Sappy.

When the wedding party retired from the vestry, the grey-headed vicar made them a courtly bow, and then John and Sappy conducted them down the church to their carriages.

'A fine couple—a very handsome couple, Kneebone,' said the old clergyman when John returned to the sanctum. 'Within my recollection there has not been so pretty a wedding here before.'

'The lady has a sweet face, sir, hasn't she?' said the clerk. 'And he be a liberal, nice-spoken gentleman.'

'Have you impressed their features upon your memory, John?' asked Mr. Huron. 'It is always advisable to do so when strangers come to be married. One never knows what might turn up.'

'I be prepared to say, sir' replied Kneebone, 'that I should know 'em again if it was twenty years afore I set my eyes on 'em.'

The clerk now began to put away the registers. He lifted the lid of the seat for the purpose of stowing them away as usual in that receptacle.

'I wish, Mr. Huron,' said he plaintively, 'I wish you would get a fire-proof safe to keep these things in.'

The vicar put on his hat and grunted.

'I do indeed, sir; it's wanted very bad. Here I'm obliged to pitch everything into these places under the seats—the registers, and the silver plate, and the surplices, and what not. It ain't decent, sir.'

Kneebone had made the same remark after every wedding or christening for nearly half a century.

'We've never had any mischance, John,' said the vicar—'no fire or robbery or anything of

that sort has hitherto happened, and I trust never will. Really, our funds are so low, the offertories are so small, we cannot afford any extra outlay.'

The old clerk sighed, and almost wept. He knew how true all this was, but yet these shiftless ways, this living from hand to mouth, was distressing to him. The love of regularity and order, his cleanly tidy habits, caused him to chafe at these makeshifts.

'Well, sir,' said he, resignedly, 'we must do the best we can. That's what I've said for these forty years, and so I fold the surplices neatly and pack the books away with care, to make the most of the room, and to keep things clean and pleasant. Heigho!'

END OF VOL. II.

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